

SERMONS,
AND
PLANS OF SERMONS,
ON MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TEXTS OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY THE LATE REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

Την διακονίαν σου πληροφορησον.—2 Tim. iv. 5.

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SERMONS,

AND

PLANS OF SERMONS.

XXXVI.

MESSIAH, THE ROOT OF JESSE.

ISAIAH XI. 10.

In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.

IF, through the infallible guidance of the divinely inspired Apostles and Evangelists, we can find the Messiah, spoken of in many passages of the Old Testament, in which we should not otherwise have found him; in many others he is so evidently intended and set forth, that, even without that guidance, no intelligent person, possessed of any degree of spiritual discernment, can fail of discovering him. Who, for instance, can read, in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession," (ver. 7, 8,) and doubt whether the Son of God, and the great extent of his kingdom, be meant? Who can

hear Isaiah declare, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," (chap. ix. 6,) and fail to perceive that his incarnation, sonship, divine and human nature, and kingly government, are intended? And, when we read, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," (chap. xlii. 1,) or, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," &c. (chap. lxi. 1.)—Do we not evidently see, that his prophetic office, and the nature of his doctrine, are foretold? And are not the miracles, whereby he should confirm his doctrine, as manifestly intended, where we read, "Behold, your God—will come and save you: then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." (chap. xxxv. 4—6.) Are not his sufferings, the atonement thereby to be made for sin, and the glory that should follow, as manifestly signified, when it is said, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Isai. l. 6.) "They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots

upon my vesture." (Psalm xxii. 16—18) "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink?" (Psalm lxi. 21.) Also, when Jehovah himself speaks by Isaiah, "Behold my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high?" (chap. lii. 13.) Or, when the Prophet goes on, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; he is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief?" (chap. liii. 2, 3.) We cannot but acknowledge, Daniel spoke of him, when he said, The "Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself;" (chap. ix. 26;) and as certainly did Zechariah refer to him only, when he said, "Behold the man, whose name is the BRANCH, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both," (chap. vi. 12, 13.)

Very similar to the last quoted passage, and alike evidently spoken of the Messiah, is that from which I now take my text. This paragraph is so manifestly meant of Christ, and of his kingdom, that it is perfectly incapable of any other application. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse," or, rather, *the stump*, signifying that the Messiah should be born of the royal house of David, at a time when it should be reduced to the lowest condition, like a tree cut down to a mere stump, or root under the ground. The Prophet does not say, "the stem" of *David*, but "of *Jesse*," who was a private and mean man, to inti-

mate that, at the time of Christ's birth, the family of David would be no higher than of a private person.—“And the Spirit of the Lord;” the Holy Ghost, by which he was anointed, (Acts x. 38,) “shall rest upon him;” shall not occasionally visit him, but have its constant and settled abode in him.—“The spirit of wisdom and understanding;” qualifications necessary to him, in his human nature, as the governor and teacher of his people.—“The spirit of counsel and might;” of prudence, to give counsel, and of might and courage to execute it.—“The spirit of knowledge;” of the perfect knowledge of the whole will and counsel of God, as also of all secret things, yea, of the hearts of men.—“And of the fear of the Lord;” a holy and reverential fear, a watchful and continual care to please, and aversion to offend him.—“And shall make him of quick understanding,” or of *quick discernment*, as Bishop Lowth renders it, “in the fear of the Lord;” in all which concerns the worship and service of God, and every part of religion. Or, referring to his office, as the future Judge of all men, it may mean, that he shall discharge that office with exact discrimination and impartiality, as the fear of God should prompt every judge to do.—“And he shall not judge after the sight of the eyes;” according to outward appearance, as men do, because they cannot search the heart; “neither reprove,” or condemn any person, “after the hearing of the ears;” by uncertain rumours or suggestions; he shall thoroughly examine all causes, and search out the truth of things, and the very hearts of men.—“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor;” whom human judges commonly neglect and oppress, but whom he shall defend and deliver from

their oppressors.—“And reprove with equity for the meek of the earth;” condemning the malicious enemies of his people, who, like himself, should be “meek and lowly in heart,” and consequently exposed to the contempt and injuries of men.—“And he shall smite the earth,” the men of the earth, that is, the carnal and ungodly, with the rod of his mouth, *i. e.* with his word, which is called the rod of his power, (Psalm cx. 3,) and which is sharper than a sword; (Heb. iv. 12;) by the preaching whereof he subdues the world to himself, and, by executing the threatenings of which he will destroy his enemies. (2 Thess. ii. 8.)—And, it is added, “by the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked;” the impenitent and irreclaimable, who will not obey the truth, but persist to obey unrighteousness. Whom he will slay by the breath of his mouth, which, as a flame of fire, shall devour them.*—“And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins;” justice and fidelity shall be conspicuous in the whole administration of his government, and be at once the ornament and support of it.—“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,” &c. (ver. 6—8.) We have here a metaphorical description of the happy effects of this kingdom of righteousness and grace. The subjects of it are described under the emblem of a flock, lying down and feeding under the care of the Messiah, as the great and chief Shepherd, in the utmost peace and security. Men of

* The latter part of this verse will be eminently fulfilled in the destruction of Antichrist, to whom St Paul applies it, (2 Thess. ii. 3—8,) who is, by way of eminence, called “the wicked one,” “the man of sin,” and *ο αντιχριστος*, “the adversary to God’s truth and people.” See the *Author’s Commentary*.

fierce, cruel, and ungovernable passions, shall be so transformed, by the preaching of the gospel, and by the grace of Christ, that they shall become most humble, gentle, and benevolent, and shall no more vex and persecute the poor and meek, mentioned ver. 4, but shall become like them. Yea, the most inveterate enemies of the kingdom of God, such as the persecuting Saul, shall be brought into its communion, having laid down their cruelty and inclination to hurt; their craft and subtility. And people generally being enlightened with truth, and renewed by grace, shall put off their selfish and depraved manners, and willingly subject themselves to the rule of the Messiah, with meekness and humility, and shall fulfil the law of brotherly love in all its duties and offices.—“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” Here the Prophet himself gives us a key, wherewith to open his meaning in the three preceding verses. By the “holy mountain,” he means, the Christian Church, frequently represented by Mount Zion, in the prophetic Scriptures, the members of which, that is, the true and genuine followers of Christ, will ever resemble him in gentleness and benevolence, and, in due time, all mankind shall hear, and submit to his doctrine, and experience the blessed effects of it.—For “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Although this prophecy begin to be fulfilled, wherever the kingdom of grace prevails, yet, the perfect accomplishment of it will not be witnessed, till those latter days come, when according to the Scriptures, the knowledge and practice of Christianity will be universally diffused, and all those divine virtues, which it inculcates, will

be most eminently exerted and displayed.—“And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.”

In these words we have,

I. THE PERSON, AND ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL OFFICES OF THE MESSIAH,—“A ROOT OF JESSE,” “AN ENSIGN OF THE PEOPLE.”

In the preceding verses, he is set forth, in his human nature, as the “rod” which should “come forth out of the stem of Jesse,” “the branch which should grow out of his roots.” (See also Jer. xxiii. 5; and Zech. iii. 8.) but here, in his divine nature, in which alone he could be the “root of Jesse;” the creating “word.” (John i. 1; Col. i. 16.) The word here rendered *root*, is properly so translated, and never means *branch* or *rod*. This is the case likewise in Rev. v. 5. In Rev. xxii. 16, we find both natures mentioned and distinguished; and also in Rom. i. 3, 4.

We may notice next his office; “He shall stand for an *ensign* of the people.” The Hebrew word means also *banner* or *standard*. He is a “standard,”—To which men are called to resort; “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” (Gen. xlix. 10.) “Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee, shall run unto thee. (Isai. lv. 5.)—By resorting to which all are united, (John xi. 52; Eph. i. 10; ii. 14,) whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. male or female.—Where they may take oath, and swear allegiance to the great King, and bind themselves by covenant to be his loyal subjects.—Where they may

enlist and engage to be his faithful soldiers, "to fight under his banner to their life's end, ' and never to desert their colours, still less, go over to the enemy. — —

But how is he an ensign, a banner, or standard, visibly displayed?—By manifestation of his real character, and showing himself to be the very Messiah that should come; the Shiloh to whom the gathering of the people was to be; the prophet like unto Moses; the priest after the order of Melchizedek; the king of Israel, set on the holy hill of Zion; Immanuel, God with us; God dwelling in flesh, and made manifest not only to our understanding, but, as far as possible, even to our senses. (1 John i. 1—3.)—By unfurling and unfolding the truth in his doctrine.—By exerting, and displaying his power in miracles —By manifesting his love in all his actions and sufferings "His banner over me is love." (Cant. ii. 4.)—As lifted up upon the cross, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." (John xii. 32.)—As exalted to the Father's right hand. (Acts ii. 33.)—As preached, and declared to every creature, to every nation under heaven, to every kindred, and tongue, and people, (Rev. xiv 6,) in the everlasting Gospel, for the obedience of faith among all nations.—As coming in the clouds of heaven, gathering his elect, gathering "all nations and tongues," to see his glory.

II. THE APPLICATION THAT IS TO BE MADE TO HIM BY THE GENTILES.

"To him shall the Gentiles," Hebrew, the nations, "seek."

He himself came to seek and save the lost, and he is often found of those that before sought him not.

“My sheep,” he says, “hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John x. 27;) and, speaking of the Gentiles, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must *bring*, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” (ver. 16.) Those however, that are first found of him, or that hear and learn of the Father, do themselves also seek him. But for what purposes?—Conscious of their ignorance, and of the errors in which they are, or may be involved, they seek to him as an infallible teacher, for truth and grace; for truth from his word, and ability to discern that truth, and relish it by his Spirit. They trust not to their own wisdom, or call any one “Master,” knowing they have “one master, even Christ.”—Conscious that they are not without law to God, (Rom. ii. 14, 15,) that they have broken the law which they are under, and are involved in guilt, and exposed to condemnation and wrath, they seek to him as a Mediator for pardon, reconciliation, and peace, and not to any righteousness of their own.—Conscious that their nature is depraved; that they are under the dominion of the flesh, the desires of which they fulfil; of the law in their members, which brings them into captivity; that they are under the power of the world, and of the devil, “the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;” and that they are unable to save themselves, they seek to him as an all-sufficient Saviour; expecting deliverance from the power and pollution of sin, from the flesh, the world and the devil; expecting a restoration to the divine image, as attainable only from him, and not from their own endeavours.—Conscious they have been as sheep going astray, “scattered abroad as sheep that had no shep-

herd;" "not a people," much less the people of God; exposed to their enemies; utterly defenceless; they seek to him, as their rightful sovereign, to give law to them, to rule, protect, and exalt them. They are subject to his sway, and put themselves under his protection. Thus the Septuagint, "He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust."—Conscious that they are called to be soldiers; that they must war a good warfare against the enemies which oppose their passage to the promised land; that those enemies must be overcome; otherwise they cannot arrive at it; they seek to him as the Captain of their salvation; the Captain of the Lord's host, the leader and commander of the people, (Isai. lv. 4,) to go before them and conquer for them, to enable them to conquer, and to crown them as victorious — —

But how do they seek him?—By desire, earnest, constant, increasing, restless; (Isai. lv. i; John vii. 37; Rev. xxii. 17;)—By prayer; (Joel ii. 32; Acts ii. 21; Rom. x. 13; 1 Cor. i. 2;)—By faith and trust. (Isai. xxviii. 16; Rom. x. 11; xv. 12.)

III. THE EFFECTS THAT SHOULD FOLLOW.

"His rest shall be glorious."

As a teacher, the "light of the world," and as made of God to his people "wisdom," he gives rest to the understanding from the fluctuations and uncertainties of error, by the clear and satisfactory knowledge of the truth, and faith therein, or "the full assurance of understanding." (Col. ii. 2.)—As a priest, and as made of God to us "righteousness," he gives rest to the conscience, by his blood, and the redemption, reconcilia-

tion, justification, and peace obtained thereby. (Matt. xi. 28; Isai. xii. 1.)—As a saviour from sin, and as made of God unto us “sanctification,” he gives rest to the will, affections, and passions, humbling our pride, subduing our rebellious dispositions, raising our affections to things above, regulating our passions, and imparting to us a resigned, patient, lowly, meek, gentle, long-suffering, and forgiving mind. (Matt. xi. 29.)—As a king, by delivering, defending, governing, ordering, disposing, and making all things work for good, and setting up his kingdom in our hearts, he gives us rest from cares, fears, and anxieties. He enables us to “be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication to let our requests be made known unto God. “And” so “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. iv. 7.)—As the Captain of our salvation, he gives the rest consequent on victory over our enemies, in deliverance from all tormenting fear of them, even the fear of death, and enabling us, while on earth, to live in peace, love and harmony, with one another.

He gives,—The rest of faith and confidence; (Isai. xxvi. 3, 4;) not only of faith in the truth, excluding uncertainty and error, and justifying and sanctifying faith, but of confidence in God’s wisdom, power, love, faithfulness; “the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.” Thus we who have *believed* do enter into rest.” (Heb. iv. 3.)—The rest of hope and expectation; resembling the rest of a ship at anchor. (Heb. vi. 19.)—The rest of love both to God and all men. “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 John iv. 16.) “Return unto thy

rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." (Psa. cxvi. 7.)—Rest to the earth during the millennium. (Isai. xi. 6—9; ix. 7; xxxii. 15—19; Mic. iv. 1—4; Zech. xiv. 6—9.) The rest of glory. (Heb. iv. 3—9.) His rest, says the text, shall be "glorious." LXX. *τιμη*, for an *honour* or honourable. Such is even the rest of grace. Still, while we are on earth, we have *not our rest*, for it is polluted. But the rest of paradise, being a final cessation of our labour and toil, infirmity and affliction, pain and temptation, sin and sorrow, with Jesus and his angels; and the rest of the third heaven, in the vision and enjoyment of God for ever, is indeed "glory," as the Hebrew word may be rendered.

XXXVII.

THE GOSPEL FEAST.

ISAIAH XXV. 6—9.

In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

THE sense and application of this important passage will more clearly appear, if we examine the preceding context. The Prophet, in the foregoing chapter, had predicted the most desolating judgments as about to come, it appears, upon the land of Judea; so desolating, that the few, who should escape, are compared to the “gleanings after the vintage is done.” (ch. xxiv. 13.) Many of these, however, would profit by the calamities, which had been experienced by their countrymen; for they are represented as celebrating the glorious power and goodness of God, which had been shown in their deliverance. As the

prophecy seems to have been principally accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem, by the Romans, and the prodigious slaughter of the Jews, which then took place; so, the remnant, that are mentioned as escaping, and singing "for the majesty of the Lord," appear to be such of them as embraced Christianity, who, in whatever countries of Europe or Asia, or the islands of the Mediterranean sea, they were scattered, united songs with their prayers to God, whose majesty was made conspicuous in fulfilling his threatened judgments, and excited each other to "glorify" him "in the fires" of affliction and persecution, through which they were called to pass. But whilst from the uttermost parts of the earth, where this pious remnant were dispersed, were heard "songs, even glory to the righteous," or the Righteous or Just One, that is, to the Messiah, the Prophet complains, "My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously." Foreseeing the times of Christ, he is deeply affected that so few of his countrymen would believe in him, and that the generality of them would act the same perfidious part, which their ancestors had often done, by rejecting the Messiah, notwithstanding the ample credentials wherewith his mission would be accompanied. Then again, referring, in terms of great sublimity, borrowed principally from the deluge, and from earthquakes, to the awful calamities, which would inevitably overwhelm the nation, and subvert its civil and ecclesiastical constitution, (ver 17—20,) he adds, "It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones," meaning, perhaps, the chief priests, with the

high priest at their head, "and the kings of the earth," meaning the civil magistrates, "shall be gathered together" by an especial providence, for their punishment, "as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison." It is remarkable that the greater part of the Jewish nation were assembled together in their capital, at the time of the passover, when Titus encamped before the city, and shut them in by an uninterrupted bulwark; in consequence of which they suffered unparralleled miseries from famine and pestilence, as well as from the sword of their enemies. And that part of the nation which survived those sufferings, were not only subjected to much oppression and misery, in the countries where they were dispersed, but were shut up by God, in unbelief for a series of ages.—But "after many days shall they be visited." They shall be convinced of their sin, especially in crucifying the Messiah, and brought back to God by true repentance. Then shall Christ set up his kingdom upon earth, with a glory far exceeding all that shall have been witnessed till that happy period, for its splendour shall throw obscurity on the mightiest human governments, and upon every former dispensation of religion. "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed," when Messiah, who, though man, is also God, "the Lord of Hosts, shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients," the elders and ministers of his church, "gloriously." • •

In the prospect of these events, the Prophet, in the name of every sincere member of the Church, breaks forth into a song of praise on account of "the wonderful things," which, at different periods, God had done

for his people, against their enemies; and his “counsels,” which he had declared “of old,” to his Prophets, all of which should be accomplished. (ver. 1.) “Thou hast made of a city an heap, of a defenced city a ruin; a palace of strangers to be no city, it shall never be built.” (ver. 2.) This refers to the destruction of Nineveh, Babylon, but particularly the latter, being strongly fortified cities, inhabited by strangers to God, and the enemies of his people, and in the destruction of which was afforded a type of the deliverance of the Christian Church from all antichristian powers.—“Therefore the strong people,” the fiercest enemies, observing such displays of thy power and justice, shall “fear thee,” being convinced and converted, or, at least, obliged to tremble at thy presence. “Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when” or rather “for,” or, “therefore,” as the Hebrew particle, *וְ*, generally signifies, “the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm,” of hail, rain, or wind, “against the wall,”—making a great noise, without producing any effect. Instances of the inefficacy of the most furious attacks against the Church, while under the protection of Jehovah, have been numerous. “Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers as the heat in a dry place,”—namely, by interposing thy protection, “with the shadow of a cloud.” “The branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low;”—the flourishing prosperity of the most powerful assailants shall be humbled and broken. Then, in the words of the text, the Prophet foretells the ample provision which God would make for the spiritual wants of all men, whether Jews or

Gentiles, by the Gospel, and the triumph of believers in the second advent of Messiah, bringing salvation with him.

We shall describe,

I. THE FEAST.

Spiritual blessings are here, as in other places, set forth under the emblem of a feast. (Prov. ix. 2—5; Luke xiv. 16—24; Matt. xxii. 4.)

In Christ, and in his Gospel, provision is made for our refreshment in various respects.—Truth is afforded for the information of the understanding. As he is the wisdom of God incarnate, possessing “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and the word of God, revealing that wisdom; so he is the truth of God. What he knows and reveals is infallible. Of this we have, in his Gospel, a feast. It gives us information respecting things of infinite magnitude, of eternal duration, infinitely excellent in themselves, and infinitely interesting to us. I mean, things relating to the nature and attributes of God, and the relations in which he stands to mankind in general, and to his people in particular; relating to the person and offices, the humiliation and exaltation, the grace and glory of the Son of God; relating to the Spirit of God, his nature and essence, and his operations in the souls of men for their salvation. The Gospel reveals to us our fall in Adam, with the sinfulness and guilt, the depravity, weakness and misery, entailed upon us thereby; our redemption by Christ, with the nature and properties, causes and effects, of that salvation which is by faith in him. In the Gospel are revealed

the will of God concerning us; the immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body; the conflagration of the world; the final judgment of men and angels; and the future restitution of all things.—Here are manifested pardoning mercy, reconciliation and peace with God, for the refreshment of the conscience, through Christ's atonement and intercession. Thus, (Matt. xi. 28,) "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—Beauty, (the amiable perfections of God and Christ,) goodness love, hope, joy, to interest our affections. These are communicated through the influence of the Spirit, unfolding and applying the declarations and promises of the Word.

Provision is also made—For the sustenance of the Divine life in the soul. (John vi. 32, 33, 47—57.)—For spiritual strength in our warfare, duty, and sufferings.—For our nourishment and growth in grace. There is "milk" for babes, "that they may grow thereby;" (1 Pet. ii. 2;) "stronger meat" for those who are more advanced. We are fed with *knowledge*; "I will give you pastors,—which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding;" (Jer. iii. 15:) that "leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ we may go on unto perfection." (Heb. v. 12—14; vi. 1.) And with *grace*. The members and faculties of the new man are thus invigorated and strengthened, and we are advanced "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" (Eph. iv. 13—16.) we are made "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

In the Gospel, there is not barely provision, but a *feast*; abundant provision.—A rich variety of truths, and clear and satisfactory discoveries concerning

them.—Abundant mercy, to remove the most aggravated guilt, and to give assurance of pardon; reconciliation, and peace.—Abundant grace to purify from all defilement, and enrich with holiness and comfort. “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John xvi. 24.) “He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John vii. 38.) “They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by Jesus Christ.” (Rom. v. 17.)

There is, indeed, most agreeable, rich, and delightful provision. But, for whom? For those who have their spiritual taste rectified, and have spiritual discernment. Not for the “natural man;” he “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

“A feast of *fat things*.” Bishop Lowth reads, “of *delicacies*,” “Of fat things *full of marrow*,” or “of delicacies *exquisitely rich*.” The truths of the Gospel are enlarging, ennobling, and consoling to the mind; the grace of it enriching, invigorating, and comforting to the spirit; its doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, sweet and precious. “How sweet are thy words to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psal. cx. 103.)

Cheering, exhilarating provision. “*Wines on the lees*,” or “*old wines*.” Bishop Lowth. Wines kept long on the lees. The truths of the Gospel give the fullest satisfaction and comfort to believers, by assuring them of the infinite love of God to them. How unspeakably dear his people are to God! They have assurances of their justification and acceptance with him; they know that his watchful providence is over

them, making all things work together for their good; that they are his children and his heirs. They have immortal hopes; communion with God; the earnest of their future inheritance in their hearts; joy and consolation abounding.—“Wines on the lees *well refined*.” Refined from every impure, carnal, and worldly mixture. —

But where is the feast made? “In this mountain.” This is said in allusion to Judea, a mountainous country, and especially to Jerusalem and Mount Zion, where this provision was first made. There Christ died and rose again, the Spirit was first poured out, the Gospel first preached, and the Christian Church first formed. But the Christian Church itself is often figuratively described under the terms, *Jerusalem* and *Mount Zion*. See Heb. xii. 22.

Do we further inquire, for whom this feast is made, and on what terms such may partake of it? It is made “for all people;” (Luke ii. 10, 31;) for Jews and Gentiles, for professors and profane, on the terms of repentance and faith. To this feast we are invited. — But we neither know by nature our want of these blessings, nor the worth of them, nor the way of attaining them. To remedy this evil, we have—

II. A GRACIOUS PROMISE.

“He will destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.”

The “face of the covering” is put, by an hypallage, for “the covering of the face;” as “silver of shekels” is put for “shekels of silver;” or, it is put for “the covering,” or “vail,” as the next clause expounds it; the

word "face" being superfluous. The expression has a reference to the vail that was upon the face of Moses, or to that of the tabernacle and temple, both emblematical of the obscurity of that dispensation, which was, so to speak, a moon-light dispensation, showing Divine things in an indistinct and imperfect way. (See 2 Cor. iii. 12—15.) But much darker was the dispensation the heathen were under. Darkness covered the earth, utter ignorance and folly in divine things. — — The vail of unbelief is also intended; (Rom. xi. 32;) and that of prejudice, which so much impedes the acceptance of "the truth as it is in Jesus." — —

These vails are removed by the plain and powerful preaching of the Gospel. (2 Cor. iii. 12, 13.)—By the circulation of the Scriptures.—By the "Spirit of wisdom and relation." (Eph. i. 17—19.)—By the "heart turning to the Lord," (2 Cor. iii. 16,) and faith in Jesus. (John xii. 46.)

Here we have a manifest prophecy of the illumination and conversion of both Jews and Gentiles, and of the universal spread of religion.—

III. THE EFFECT PRODUCED.

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth."

The Messiah who is the "light of the world," is the "light of life." (John viii. 12.) "He will swallow up death in victory."

Spiritual death, introduced by the sin of Adam (Gen. iii. 8; Rom. v. 12,) is swallowed up in victory. for

being naturally dead in sins, we are made alive to God, and to all holy duties through Christ, and by faith in him. (1 John iv. 9; John xx. 31; x. 10; xiv. 19.) Hence, "he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John v. 12) [He that preacheth should enlarge on the nature, necessity, and blessed effects of this life.]

Temporal death. With respect to all that believe in him, Jesus destroys the sting of it, which is the guilt and power of sin, (1 Cor. xv. 54—56,) and the fear of it. (Heb. ii. 15.) Death, is not death to a believer. (John xi. 25, 26; Rom. viii. 10, 11; 1 John v. 11—13.) Death itself will be abolished. (2 Tim. i. 10.) "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." (Hos. xiii. 14.) The very body of the Christian shall be raised, and all the traces of death, with respect to him, shall be done away. (1 Cor. xv. 55.) Bishop Lowth reads, "He shall utterly destroy death for ever." The resurrection of Christ is a proof and an earnest of this; "Christ the first fruits; afterward, they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. xv. 23.) The promises of God, and the prophetic visions of the Prophets and Apostles, assure us of it.

"The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." He will remove sufferings and sorrows, and the causes of them for ever. (Rev. xxi. 4.) Of this we are blessed with a well-grounded and lively hope here. (1 Pet. i. 3; iii. 15.) And we shall have the full enjoyment hereafter.

"And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth." This implies, that the people of God have been, and will be more or less, under re-

proach, in all ages, till the glorious period here spoken of arrive. "Thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. iii. 15.) "He that is born after the flesh" will always persecute "him that is born after the Spirit." (Gal. iv. 29.) "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. iii. 12.) But then it shall cease for ever. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." (Mal. iii. 18.)

IV. THE JOY AND TRIUMPH OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us, this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Their enemies now reproach them, "Where is your God?" "He trusted in God, that he would deliver him, let him deliver him, seeing he delighted him." But what will then be the reply of the Lord's people? "Lo, this is our God;" we have trusted, hoped, waited for him, (Tit. ii. 13,) and now he hath saved us. — Henceforth we shall have the everlasting fruition of his glorious presence. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. xiii. 43.)

The presence of God shall remain with the Church. (ver. 10.) "For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest." His powerful and gracious presence shall have its constant residence, and shall ever continue with the Church.—"And Moab" (who having been, as were also the Edomites, implacable enemies of Israel, are put for every enemy,) "shall be trodden down under him, as straw is trodden down for the dunghill."

XXXVIII.

INSENSIBILITY OF THE WICKED.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9, 10.

*When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.**

God has written, and spread before mankind, three large books, all of which are legible and intelligible to such as have eyes to see, and a disposition of mind to read them with attention. These are, the book of nature, of Scripture, and of Providence. The first was written in six days; the second, intended to explain the first, in not less than nearly two thousand years, and the last, which is to enforce both, has been in writing from the beginning hitherto, and is not yet finished, nor will be, till the day of final judgment, and consummation of all things. All these books are intended to teach us righteousness, by instructing us in the knowledge of God, his nature, his attributes, and his ways. The first displays his power, his wisdom, and goodness, in the creation of all things, and is calculated to beget in our minds adoration, reverence, esteem, gratitude, fear and love towards him. The second displays his mercy, grace, and love, in the redemption of fallen man, and

* This, and the following Sermon, were preached on occasion of national fasts.

his truth and faithfulness in fulfilling his declarations and promises; as also his holiness, equity, and goodness, in his method of ruling, rewarding or punishing mankind. The third displays his omnipresence, his omnipotence, his goodness, his justice, his wrath, his patience, his forbearance, his long-suffering in preserving, superintending, providing for, chastening, supporting, relieving, comforting us, in all the variety of human conditions. •

None of these books should be despised, overlooked, or neglected. They are all important, and it is probable, nay, I think, certain, that any of them, do and will neglect them all. They mutually explain and refer to each other. *e. g.* The second, the book of Scripture, begins with informing us how God made the book of nature, and created the heavens and the earth; it assures us, that "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," (Rom. i. 20,) and gives us a history of the third, or the book of Providence. And this last compels us to study the second for direction and comfort, in cases of perplexity and trial which occur continually, and occasions us still to know and feel that we are amenable to the justice, dependent on the mercy and subject to the government of that being that made us and all things. To this last our attention is called by the words of our text.

Inquire we,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "LEARNING RIGHTEOUSNESS."

It is not false but true righteousness, which is here meant.—Not *hypocritical* righteousness, like that of many of the Pharisees, being merely pretended, proceeding from no sincere desire to be accepted of God, to please or glorify him, to profit mankind, or save our souls.—Not *ceremonial* righteousness, like that of most of the Jews, who confided in circumcision, and other ceremonies of their law; or like that of the Papists, who depend on the sacrifice of the mass, confession, absolution, the abstaining from flesh in Lent, the doing penance, and the like.—Not *partial* and inconstant righteousness, such as the tithing "mint, and anise, and cummin," and the neglecting of "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." (Matt. xxiii. 23.)—Not merely *external* righteousness, such as that of St. Paul, before his illumination, and that of all unawakened sinners.—Not *our own* righteousness, (Phil. iii. 9;) a righteousness proceeding from, and terminating in ourselves, performed by the mere strength of nature, in obedience to an outward law; which implies neither forgiveness for the past, nor renovation for the present, nor holiness for the future, but leaves the soul under guilt, and in its natural state of depravity and weakness. Such a righteousness would answer no valuable end, either to the glory of God, to the edification of others, or our own salvation.

True righteousness is intended; That which was possessed by "righteous Abel," (Matt. xxiii. 35,) who, "by faith obtained witness that he was righteous, God

testifying of his gifts;" (Heb. xi. 4;) By Noah, to whose righteousness God himself bore witness, (Gen. vii. 1,) "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation;" and who, confiding in God's promise, and obeying his command, "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith," (Heb. xi. 7,) and was "a preacher of righteousness" to others; (2 Pet. ii. 5;)—That which Abraham received, when having in obedience to God, and in reliance on his promise, left his "country, his kindred, and his father's house," (Gen. xii. 1,) he "believed God" when he said, that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and his faith was "counted to him for righteousness;" (Gen. xv. 5, 6;)—That which Balaam had in view, when he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," (Num. xxiii. 10,)—And Isaiah, when he received commission, in the midst of many judgments coming on his country, to "say to the righteous it should be well with them, for they should eat of the fruit of their doing." (ch. iii. 10.)—The "righteousness" is here intended, which the "righteous Lord loveth." (Psal. xi. 7.) The first, and principal branch of the kingdom of God on earth, is righteousness, (Rom. xiv. 17,) and without it we cannot enter the kingdom of God in heaven. For, "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. vi. 9.)—It is that righteousness, through which "grace reigns unto eternal life." (Rom. v. 21.)

This righteousness is not human; it is not in us, nor possessed by us by nature. (Rom. iii. 10.) "Not having *mine own* righteousness, which is of the law." (Phil. iii. 9.) Hence the error of the Jews, who went about "to establish their *own* righteousness, having not sub-

mitted themselves unto the righteousness of God?" (Rom. x. 3.) It is the supernatural gift of God, and the fruit of grace. (Rom. v. 17.)

Its nature is not legal, or of the law; but evangelical, or of faith. It comprehends three particulars.—The justification of our persons, termed by St. Paul the imputation of righteousness, and the non-imputation, or pardon of sin. (Rom. iv. 3—7.)—The regeneration or renovation of our nature. (Eph. iv. 22—24; Col. iii. 10.)—That we "walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." (Luke 1. 6; 1 John iii. 7.)—

This righteousness in all its branches is obtained through "the Lord our righteousness," (Jer. xxiii. 6; Rom. x. 4; 1 Cor. i. 30,) by faith in him as a Teacher, Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Lawgiver, Governor, Shepherd, and Bishop of souls, and Judge of all, and in his promises, together with his power, and love, and faithfulness to fulfil them.

This righteousness must be learned not merely in theory, so as to have just, and clear, and full views of its nature, necessity, excellency, utility, attainableness, and the way of attaining it. But, it must be learned by experience, and practice. We must be heartily convinced of our unrighteousness, humbled on that account, and brought to repentance. We must renounce our own righteousness, and all dependence thereon. We must cordially embrace Christ by faith, have recourse to, and rely upon, his mediation, atonement, and intercession, his merits and Spirit.

In consequence of justification, we must have "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy

Ghost given unto us." (Rom. v. 5,) and by this principle we must be actuated in all our conduct.

Consider the vast, the infinite importance, of "learning righteousness," in this sense. All other learning, as of sciences, arts, gaining wealth, or power, or honour, is, compared to this, insignificant. This is closely connected with and indispensably requisite to our present, as well as future salvation and happiness, to the glory of God, to the best interests of our fellow-creatures, to our usefulness, and sincerity as Christians. The attainment of this righteousness is the end of man's creation, preservation, and redemption. For this end, God raised up Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles; for this he gave his Oracles, and confirmed them with signs following; for this he sent his Son to assume our nature, to live, teach, die, atone, rise, ascend, intercede, and reign. — This is the end of all God's providential dispensations, and especially of his judgments in the earth; to teach us righteousness. And, if we will not otherwise be brought to learn it, we had better suffer even the most severe and dreadful of them. This leads me to consider,

II. WHEN IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT MANKIND WILL LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"When thy judgments are in the earth."—The judgments of God in Scripture often mean his ordinances, or his laws. (Psalm cxix, 7; Ezek. v. 6—8, 10.) These, if attended to, and used aright, through the influence of the Divine Spirit, would teach us righteousness. But, alas! they are neglected or abused, and, perhaps, despised. It becomes, therefore, ne-

cessary God should give us judgments of another kind, and such as are here chiefly meant, as the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. (Ezek. vii. 15; xiv. 12—21.)

These visitations are intended to produce this effect; to teach people righteousness. They are not sent, so properly to punish, as to correct and amend. (Isai. iv. 4; 1 Pet. iv. 17; Zech. xiii. 8, 9.)

They have a direct tendency to produce this effect.—They cause thoughtfulness and consideration; a spirit of inquiry, as to the cause and design of these judgments; and lead us to search the Scriptures for information.—They cause a spirit of prayer for divine light and grace; the rectifying of our mistaken views of God's government of the world, and of the nature and obligation of holiness; the acknowledgment of his righteousness in thus correcting us; humiliation and contrition; hatred to sin, the evil of which we are now so severely taught, and which we see to be the cause of all our sorrows; reformation of life; deadness to the world, the vanity and misery of which we now see and feel.—They cause us to seek all our happiness in God, as the only certain and durable source of felicity, and they cause subjection to his will; these judgments naturally tending to subdue us.

They actually do produce this effect on the people of God, and on persons disposed to be his people. (ver. 8, 9.)

It is moreover, highly reasonable they should have this effect on such of the inhabitants of the earth, as are thus chastised. They may hereby see that God governs the world, that he does not connive at sin, but severely punishes it; and that "it is an evil

thing, and bitter, to forsake the Lord God," (Jer. ii. 19,) whether as individuals, as families or as a nation.

But, it may be asked, will not gentler methods answer the same end? May not the inhabitants of the earth be taught righteousness by divine mercies and favours? To answer this inquiry, brings me to show,

III. IF THEY DO NOT LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS THEN, THERE IS REASON TO FEAR THEY NEVER WILL.

"Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness."

It must be admitted that God does show favour to the wicked in many ways. For "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. v. 45.) He often prospers the wicked, and gives them abundance of worldly store. They escape the stroke of many judgments, by which others, perhaps less wicked, are cut off. In some instances, they are favoured above their neighbours. The design is, that, by these means, they may be influenced to love and serve that God, who thus favours them. But it is in vain; they will not be led to repentance by the goodness of God.

Observe the reasons why this is the case. These are,—A thoughtlessness of mind and want of consideration,—Levity of character,—Inattention to, or unbelief of the Scriptures, and the dispensations of Providence,—False views of themselves, of the divine character and proceedings,—Pride and self-confidence,—The carnal mind and self-will,—Hardness of heart,—The love of sin,—The love of the world,—

Neglect of, and an aversion to prayer,—Disrelish of, and dislike to the word and ordinances of God,—Dislike, perhaps hatred, to his people.

Hence even “in the land of uprightness,” will they “deal unjustly!” Where religion is professed and is in reputation; where the word of God is preached, and good examples set them. Heb. “in a land of evenness,” where there are not so many stumbling-blocks as in other places; in a land of correction, where vice and profaneness are discountenanced and punished; yet there they will “deal unjustly,” or unrighteously; they will go on frowardly in their wicked ways. They that do wickedly, or continue in sin, deal unjustly with God and man, and with their own souls. And those that will not be reclaimed by the word and ordinances of God, nor by the justice of the nation, may expect the judgments of God upon them. Nor can they expect to have hereafter a place in the land of blessedness, who now improve not the privileges they have in the “land of uprightness.”

One grand cause of this is, “They will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”—God’s majesty appears in all the dispensations of his Providence, as well as in the works of Creation. But they regard it not, and therefore, study not to fulfil the end of those dispensations. They impute things to chance, and to second causes, instead of the interference of an intelligent and righteous Power, which ruleth over all.—They will not believe, much less consider, what a God of terrible majesty he is, whose laws and justice they persist to hold in contempt.

But will it not be sufficient if God “lift up his hand,” and give them warning? that by repentance,

faith, and prayer, they may make their peace with him? No. They take no notice of it; they are not aware that God is angry with them, or is coming forth against them. "They will not see." They shut their eyes against the clearest convictions of guilt and wrath. They ascribe to accidental causes or common fate, what is manifestly a divine rebuke. They regard not the indications and symptoms of their own ruin, but cry, "peace" to themselves, when the holy and just God is waging war against them.

APPLICATION.

Have you learned righteousness?

Do you understand, experience, and practise it.

[Let the preacher recapitulate and inquire.—]

If not, what is the cause? Surely your lot has been cast in "a land of uprightness," as above explained, and you have had all possible advantages. — — —

Perhaps you have not considered the importance, the infinite importance of learning righteousness, and how little availeth any, or every other attainment.— —

Behold! the terrible judgments of God now abroad; the many bloody battles which have been fought; and the immense slaughter made by the sword, since the breaking out of the French revolution!* — — —

* Such, with several other particulars, were the indications of the divine displeasure, at the time when this discourse was delivered; but if adopted on any other public fast, the judgments of God, which call for general humiliation, should be here specified and applied for promoting the end designed in them.

XXXIX.**THE DUTY OF REFLECTION ON GOD'S JUDGMENTS.**

ISAIAH xxvi. 20, 21.

Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold! the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

ALTHOUGH the word *chapter*, derived from the Latin *caput*, means properly a head, or article of discourse, you are not to suppose that the contents of a whole chapter, whether in the Old or New Testament, always relate to one particular subject. The division of the Sacred Writings into chapters was not made by the inspired penman, but by others, many ages after they were written, and it must be confessed, not always in the most judicious manner. Thus, these words are supposed by many judicious divines, not to be connected with the preceding part of the chapter, but to be the beginning of a new discourse, continued through the next chapter. This seems most probable, and yet we may consider these words as containing the Lord's answer to the complaints of his people, expressed in the preceding verses. Thus, they complain that when "favour is shown to the wick-

ed" they "will not learn righteousness," but "in the land of uprightness" they will "deal unjustly;" nay, that when his "hand is lifted up," they "will not see;" and even when it descends in judgments, although that is a time when, especially, the inhabitants should learn righteousness, yet that all they learn is to "visit the Lord in trouble, and pour out a prayer when his chastening is upon them." "Like as a woman with child that draweth near the time of her delivery is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have they been in thy sight, O Lord. They have been with child, they have been in pain, they have as it were, brought forth wind, they have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen." The Lord then answers to these complaints: "Well, come, my people;" intimating that nothing is to be expected from the wicked, even in times of the sorest judgments, but the people of God may be expected to lay to heart these visitations, and derive improvement from them. Observe,—

I. THE PEOPLE ADDRESSED.—

"Come, *my* people."

The Lord addresses, in these words, all, in general, who profess his name, and are named from him,—who receive his word as the rule of their faith and practice,—who attend his ordinances, and use the means of grace. All these are under great and indispensable obligations, on the principles they acknowledge, to see his hand in his dispensations; to consider why "his chastening is upon them;" to revere his justice, dread his wrath, and to amend their ways.

But will these obligations be duly regarded by them? It is to be feared they will not. Therefore his true people are more especially meant in this passage. But who are these? Are they Papists or Protestants? Churchmen, or Dissenters? Arminians, or Calvinists?—Alas, my brethren, we must go farther to find them. They are described by St. Peter, who, having termed them “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people,” says, they are “translated out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Though they were Jews, and not heathens, yet they had been in this darkness. They were now, however enlightened.—They “had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”—Though once not a people, but scattered individuals, having no spiritual union with each other, and standing in no covenant-relation to God; yet, they were *now* united to God and each other. They have been, not only received by circumcision, or baptism, into Christ’s visible church, but they have become his subjects, servants, and spouse—They are inwardly changed. “He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Rom. ii. 28, 29.)—They not only “follow after righteousness,” and “seek the Lord;” (Isai. li. 1;) but “they know,” or have attained “righteousness, and found the Lord.” (Isai. li. 7.) They “know righteousness” to be imputed to them, and implanted in them. It is also practised by them; for, “in their heart is God’s law.”

Now, in times of trouble and danger, when his "judgments" are abroad in the earth, the Lord especially speaks to such, and directs them how to conduct themselves, and how to improve those seasons.

II. THE ADVICE HE GIVES THEM.—

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

"Come, my people."—Come *to me*, and make confession. (Jer. iii. 13.) Thus did Daniel, (ch. ix. 3—14.) Nehemiah, (ch. ix. 16—26,) Jeremiah, (ch. xiv. 7, 20,) and Ezra, (ch. ix. 5—7.) Come and utter thy complaint. (ver. 17, 18.) Thus must we do, for we have great cause for it.—Present thy petitions. (ver. 8, 9.)—Exercise trust and dependence upon me.—Praise me, for my long-suffering and mercies, and devote thyself to me afresh. These are especial duties at such times. —

Come *with me* "into thy chambers." The word means retired, secret, and safe places. "Let the storm, which disperses others, bring you near together, to me and to each other."—Henry. Withdraw from the world into your chambers of separation and distinction. Do not continue mixed with the children of Babylon. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Rev. xviii. 4.) In times of peculiar trouble and danger, we are especially called to come out from among the ungodly, and be "separate, and not touch the unclean thing;" (2 Cor. vi. 17;) to have as little intercourse as possible with them, associating only with the children of God.—Withdraw into your chambers of retirement

and devotion. "Enter thou into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." (Matt. vi. 6.)

Our retirement should be improved in "searching the Scriptures," that we may understand the causes of the Divine anger, and how it becomes us to behave under his correcting rod; that we may "see his hand," and submit to it, whether others do or not;—that we may examine our own conduct, and observe whether we have given occasion, in any measure, for such judgments; (Jer. viii. 6;) that we may humble ourselves with suitable sorrow and shame, and pray both for ourselves and others.

Withdraw into the chambers of defence. Stay not abroad, lest you be caught in the storm, as the Egyptians in the hail. (Exod. ix. 21.) Israel must keep within doors, when the destroying angel is slaying the first-born of Egypt, or else the blood on the door-posts will not secure them. (Exod. xii. 23.) So must Rahab and her family, when Jericho is destroyed. (Josh. ii.) Those are most safe, that are least seen. *Qui bene latuit, bene vixit.* But not only by the secrecy, but by the strength of those chambers, you may be safe, in the most dangerous times. The attributes of God are "the secret of his tabernacle." (Psal. xxvii. 5.) His name is "a strong tower." (Prov. xviii. 10.) And "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Psal. xci. 1.) We must, by faith, find a way into those chambers, and there hide ourselves; that is, with a holy security and serenity of mind, we must put ourselves under the Divine protection; we must enter, like Noah, into the ark, and expect the Lord to "shut us in."

Thus, "hide thyself." "Thou," said David, "art my hiding place and shield." (Psal. cxix. 114.)

This is to be done "for a little moment," for a short time, like an atom of matter, when "the indignation shall be over-past," and the storm blown over. The indignation of your enemies against you, which will be "as a storm against the wall," (ch. xxv. 4.) or, that of God against your sins, and against you on account of them; this will soon be over (Psal. xxx. 5.) After he has chastised you, he will appear for you, and baffle all the subtlety, break the power, and defeat the purposes of your enemies. "You shall have tribulation ten days." When Athanasius was banished from Alexandria, by an edict of Julian, and his friends greatly lamented it, he bid them "be of good cheer;" *Nubecula est quæ cito pertransibit*. Thus we hope these calamities, tedious and afflictive as they now appear, will be of short duration. — —

III. THE REASON OF THIS ADVICE.—

"For the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

God "comes out of his place," when he shows himself in an extraordinary manner from heaven, the firmament of his power. He is "raised out of his holy habitation," where he seemed before to conceal himself, and undertakes some great work, the product of his wise, and just, and secret counsels. The expression is borrowed from the usage of princes who come out of their palaces, either to sit in judgment, or to fight against

their enemies. God will make his name known, as a prince that goes to take the field. Some have observed that God's place is the "mercy seat;" that he delights to be there; that when he punishes, he, as it were, comes out of his place; for "judgment is his strange work." — —

War is one of his peculiar judgments, and a mode of punishing iniquity, which he often uses; and it is a severe one. Of this we cannot doubt, if we recollect that thereby men are hurried into eternity in their sins; the limbs and lives of many are lost; women are left widows, children fatherless, and parents childless, and destitute? Waste and destruction are caused of the fruits of the earth, and, as a consequence, famine and pestilence! Great expense is incurred to the country; a heavy burden of taxes, &c. is occasioned; commerce and manufactures are interrupted; thousands are thrown out of employment; the means of raising the necessary supplies for the public benefit fail, and to many, the means of subsistence itself!

God has been, and is now punishing the continent by war, famine, — — — for their infidelity, profaneness, lewdness, superstition, &c.

He is punishing *us* for our own iniquity.—For our infidelity in not believing Divine Revelation.—For our ignorance of its contents.—For our ignorance of God, and neglect of him, and of his worship.—For our hypocrisy, formality, and lukewarmness in his service.—For our profanation of his name and day.—For our injustice, violence and oppression, especially of the negroes.—For the shedding of innocent blood, and secret murders.—For our gluttony, drunkenness, un-

cleanness, &c.—For the blood of the martyrs. “The earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”

XL.

THE HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH lii. 13—15.

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

It is a just observation of Bishop Lowth, in the notes which he has subjoined to his elegant translation of this book, that “the subject of Isaiah’s prophecy from the fortieth chapter inclusive has been, in general, the deliverance of the people of God. This includes in it three distinct parts, the deliverance of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon; the deliverance of the Gentiles from their miserable state of ignorance and idolatry, and the deliverance of mankind from the captivity of sin and death. These three subjects,” as the Bishop farther observes, “Isaiah has not treated as

quite distinct and separate, in a methodical and orderly manner, like a philosopher or a logician, but has taken them in a connective view; he has handled them as a Prophet, and a Poet; he has allegorized the former, and under the image of it, has shadowed out the two latter; he has thrown them all together, has mixed one with another, has passed from this to that, with rapid transitions, and has painted the whole with the strongest and boldest imagery." "Cyrus is expressly named as the immediate agent in effecting the first deliverance. A greater person than Cyrus is spoken of as the agent, who is to effect the two latter deliverances," which are the chief, if not the sole subjects, of the prophecy, from this place to the end of the book.

This person is no other than the Messiah, the Son of God, even Jesus of Nazareth, who is undoubtedly intended in our text. It is true, the Jews of modern times, have taken great pains to persuade us, that the people of Israel are intended here by God's *servant*, or Jeremiah, and some will have it that Abraham is meant, or Moses, or Joshua, or Ezra, or Zerubbabel. But the things spoken of are not applicable to any of them, but only to the Messiah. From this place to the end of the next chapter, the subject of which begins here, he is only meant, as will be obvious to any one that considers the whole passage, and as is acknowledged by the Chaldee paraphrast, and other ancient and some later Hebrew Doctors.

We have here,

I. HIS ASTONISHING HUMILIATION.

“As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”

Christ’s humiliation is particularly referred to; but it may be observed, that every thing in the Messiah was “astonishing.”

HIS PERSON. He was God and man; “the Word made flesh;” “God manifest in the flesh;” “God with us!” This is a mystery. Hence, his name is said to be “Wonderful” (Isai. ix 6; Judges xiii. 18, 19; Matt. xi. 27.) The Poet’s words are particularly applicable to him:—

“How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,
How complicate, how wonderful is man!

* * * *

From different natures marvellously mix’d,
Connection exquisite of distant worlds!
Distinguish’d link in being’s endless chain!
Midway from nothing to the Deity!
A beam ethereal, sullied and absorb’d,
Though sullied and dishonour’d, still divine!
Dim miniature of greatness absolute!
An heir of glory! a frail child of dust!
Helpless immortal! insect infinite!
A worm! A God!”

HIS UNDERTAKING. This is set forth by the Prophet Daniel. (ch. ix. 24.) — — — In particular, it is—
To enlighten the world, overspread with gross darkness as to Divine things. “I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” (Isai. xlix. 6) “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” (John xii. 46.)

The Jews were in this state of darkness, when Christ came to them, (Luke i. 78, 79; Isai. ix. 2,) ignorant of the proper use of the law of Moses, and the end of his dispensation; the true character of the Messiah and the nature of his kingdom, and the true meaning of the whole Scriptures. The Gentiles were in similar darkness, (Isai. xlii. 6; xlix. 6,) ignorant of the true God, his will and the right method of worshipping him; of the way of reconciliation with him, and of a future state.—

—To reconcile God and man, (1 Pet. iii. 18,) by removing the cause of enmity, the depravity and guilt of man, on account of which he is subject to the wrath of a righteous and just God. To remove this, he undertakes to bear all the sins of all mankind, and the sufferings due to them; (Isai. liii. 6, 7; 1 Pet. ii. 24;) to pay the whole debt incurred by all Adam's posterity to the justice of God! How stupendous an undertaking!—We may be allowed to quote the words of Milton on this occasion:—

“He ask’d: but all the heavenly quire stood mute,
And silence was in heaven: on man’s behalf,
Patron or intercessor none appear’d,
Much less that durst upon his own head draw
The deadly forfeiture, and ransom set.
And now without redemption all mankind
Must have been lost, adjudg’d to Death and Hell
By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
In whom the fulness dwells of love divine,
His dearest mediation thus renew’d.
Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace.

* * *

Behold me then; me for him, life for life
I offer; on me let thine anger fall;
Account me man; I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die
Well pleas’d.”

* * *

“Admiration seiz’d
All Heaven, what this might mean, and whither tend.”

The enmity on the part of man must also be removed. And this must be effected with great pains and patience, that there may be no violation of his natural liberty as a free and responsible creature, while his corrupt inclinations are subdued, and his affections raised from earth to heaven. For this purpose the Holy Spirit must be procured, and an intercourse opened by his operations between God and man. — —

—To overthrow the kingdom of Satan; extensive and powerful as it is, and upheld by principalities and powers; and to destroy his works, (1 John iii. 8,) which are many, mighty, destructive, and deadly, being sin, death, spiritual, temporal, and eternal. His subtlety must be outwitted, his power overthrown, his malice outdone by an exertion of love, his diligence to destroy exceeded by greater diligence to save. — —

HIS WHOLE PROCESS in the accomplishment of this undertaking is set forth in Phil. ii. 6—11; as his incarnation, (1 Tim. iii. 16,) emptying himself, and assuming our nature; (Heb. ii. 14;)—His childhood, gradually increasing in wisdom as well as in stature. How mysterious was this!—His temptation;—His doctrine; (Matt. vii. 28; John vii. 46;)—His miracles. (Matt. xiii. 54;)—His life; its innocence, its holiness, its usefulness, its benevolence! Devils were astonished to see one in flesh and blood, whom they could not overcome and draw into sin.

But, especially, his humiliation was astonishing!—That one so rich should become so poor! That he for whom and by whom all things were made, that he who was the possessor of heaven and earth, should become so destitute as to have nothing! and lead a life of poverty!—That one so high, being above all, and “Lord of

all," should be brought so low, becoming a creature, a man, a servant of servants!—That one so glorious, who had "glory with the Father before the world was," and was "in the form of God," and "the Lord of glory," should be so despised and reproached, becoming "a worm and no man, a reproach of men," so reduced as to have "no form or comeliness that men should desire him!"—That one so mighty as to speak the universe into being, and "uphold all things by the word of his power," should appear so weak, as "to be able to do nothing of himself," and be at last "crucified in weakness!"—That one so happy should be so distressed and oppressed with sorrow, as he was in the garden of Gethsemane!—That one so innocent and holy should be so exposed to suffering in every way in which he could suffer, in his property, so to speak, in his character, liberty, and life, in soul and body! — — How unprecedented and marvellous was all this!

Observe,

II. HIS GLORIOUS EXALTATION.

"Behold my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high!"—This was fulfilled in his resurrection, ascension, and session at God's right hand, whereby he was exalted and made very high in all the forementioned particulars.—In *riches*. He is made, even as man, "heir of all things." (Heb. i. 2.)—In *dignity*. (Phil. ii. 9—11.) He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords," the final Judge of angels and men.—In *glory*. He is restored to "the glory he had with the Father before the creation of the world, and is worshipped by all the heavenly host.—In

power. "All power is given to him in heaven and on earth;" all authority and might. He is "able to subdue all things to himself." (Phil. iii. 21.)—In *happiness.* He has the enjoyment of his infinite Father, his own unparalleled perfections in soul and body; the millions of the redeemed, all saved through him, and perhaps the angels confirmed in their fidelity and obedience; the universe restored to its original order and beauty.

III. THE BLESSED EFFECTS OF HIS HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION, ANSWERABLE IN EXTENT TO BOTH.

"So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them, shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."

Concerning him as a Prophet, this refers to the truths, precepts, promises, directions and encouragements; with which he does, and will water, and refresh, and render fruitful the earth. (Deut. xxxii. 2; Psal. lxxii. 6; Isai. lv. 10, 11.) Hereby men receive all needful knowledge of themselves, of God, of Christ, and of their duty, interest, and prospects in him. Having sealed the truth with his blood, and confirmed it by his resurrection, he ascended, that he might accompany it by the Spirit. It makes its way, and will prevail universally. (Hab. ii. 14.)

As a PRIEST,—It refers to the atoning blood which procures our justification. (Heb. xii. 24; ix. 13.) He died that he might provide the blood, and rose again that he might sprinkle it. Hereby he removes the guilt of men, and they are pardoned. (Rom. iii. 21.) He is

ready to communicate mercy, and offers pardon to all in this way. (2 Cor. v. 19—21.)

As a KING,—It refers to his sanctifying grace. (Ezek. xxxvi. 25.)—To take away the depravity of mankind.—To effect their renovation. (1 John i. 9; Tit. iii. 4—6.)

We may INFER,

The great love of Christ to mankind. (Eph. iii. 10.)
The great guilt of those that refuse to be sprinkled.—Their great folly also, considering their need of it.—Its freeness, being attainable to all by faith. (Heb. x. 19.)

XLI.

THE CAUSE, DESIGN, AND BENEFIT OF THE
SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH LIII. 3—5.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

THE two great things which the Spirit of Christ in the ancient Prophets testified beforehand, were “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (1 Pet. i. 11.) And when Jesus, after his resurrection, expounded to his disciples, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself, he showed the scope and purport of them all, to be that “Christ ought to have suffered, and then to enter into his glory.” But in no part of the Old Testament are these two things so fully exhibited, as in this chapter, from which many passages are quoted and applied to Christ in the New Testament. From the verses above given, we may consider,

I. THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH.

The birth of Messiah, it was expected, would have been noble and illustrious, and so it was in reality, as he was the Son of David. But this royal and illustrious family was then reduced, and sunk into obscurity. Joseph, his reputed father, was a poor carpenter; his mother was a poor woman; most of his relations were poor fishermen; the whole family was, at that time, so mean and despicable, that nothing great was to be expected from it. They resided in Galilee, a country from which, like a dry and desert ground, nothing green or flourishing could spring; a country of such small repute, that it was thought no good thing could come out of it. His mother also, being a virgin, was as a "dry ground." — —

It was expected he would make his entry into the world in a formal and solemn way, and come with pomp and observation. But, instead of that, he "grew up," not before men, who did not observe or regard him, but only *before* God, whose eye was upon him; "as a tender plant," silently and insensibly, without noise or show, as the corn grows up we "know not how," (Mark iv. 26,) increasing gradually in stature and wisdom;—"a tender plant," which might easily have been crushed. His Gospel in the beginning was "like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is the least of all seeds." — —

It was expected he would have some remarkable beauty in his face, and an extraordinary comeliness in his person, which would charm the eye, attract the heart, and raise the expectation of all men; and that he would be adorned with an external glory and splendour. But

in this they were altogether disappointed. His appearance was not engaging, his condition mean, his clothing poor; nor was his Gospel preached "with enticing words of man's wisdom." — —

It was expected he would live an easy and pleasant life, and have the enjoyment of all the delights of the sons of men; which would have invited to him all sorts of persons. But quite the contrary was the case. He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." During his whole life he endured poverty, reproach, "the contradiction of sinners against himself;" the unkindness of his relations; the weakness, ignorance, and inconsistent conduct of his own disciples. Judas proved treacherous; Peter denied his knowledge of him; and all forsook him in the hour of affliction.

He was "despised," as a mean man, "rejected" as a bad man. He was "the stone which the builders refused;" they would not have him to reign over them. "We hid, as it were, our faces from him;" we scorned to look at him, or we looked another way, and his sufferings obtained not our sympathy, though "never sorrow was like unto his sorrow." Or, as it may be read, "he hid his face from us;" he concealed the glory of his majesty, and drew a veil over it, that of our frail flesh, through which we could not see him. — — He had not only griefs and sorrows, but blows and bruises. He received stripes and wounds; he was scourged, and crowned with thorns; his hands and feet were pierced. He was arraigned, condemned, and put to an ignominious, painful, and accursed death. — — —

II. THE CAUSE AND DESIGN OF THOSE SUFFERINGS.

“We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”—A great mystery this, that so excellent a person should suffer such things! How did it happen? What evil had he done? His enemies looked upon him as suffering justly for his crimes; as stricken, smitten, and afflicted of God. Those who are justly corrected and punished by the magistrate, are smitten of God. They looked upon him as a deceiver, a blasphemer, and an enemy to Cæsar; thus rejecting him, and pouring contempt on all his offices. Those that saw him on the cross, inquired not into the merits of his cause, but took it for granted he was guilty of all laid to his charge.

But “he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows;” *i. e.* the griefs and sorrows we deserved to bear for our sins. He *bore them*, that he might prevent their falling upon us, or that he might remove them from us. “The chastisement of our peace,” or the punishment due to us, “was laid upon him,” by God’s justice, but with his own consent.

He “was wounded for our transgressions.” Not only did men’s sinfulness, their injustice, oppression, violence, envy, earthly affections, their enmity to God and goodness, induce them to contrive, and bring about his sufferings and death, as the envy and malice of the Jews, the covetousness of Judas, the cowardice and injustice of Pilate; but our sins in general were the grand cause. He suffered,—that he might expiate and put away their guilt,—that he might break their power, by showing them to be infinitely evil from the greatness of the sacrifice they required to make satisfaction for

them,—that he might purge their defilement, and open “a fountain for sin and uncleanness.” (Zech. xiii. 1.)

“The chastisement of our peace was upon him.” For our peace with God is procured through the blood of his cross. (Rom. v. 10; Eph. ii. 15; Col. i. 20.) His sufferings and death satisfy Divine justice; and take away the curse denounced against our violations of the Divine law. They open a medium for the exercise of the mercy of God, without dishonour to his holiness, and lay a foundation for faith in him.—He thereby procured also for us peace of conscience, and tranquillity of mind. “The blood of Christ shall purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Heb. ix. 14.) And his sufferings are the means of removing the causes of our disquiet, such as pride, self-will, discontent, envy, impatience; all corrupt passions, doubts, despondencies, anxious care, and, above all, the fear of death.—

III. THE BENEFIT WE OBTAIN BY THEM, AND HOW WE OBTAIN IT.

“With his stripes we are healed.”—We are healed—of our inattention and unconcern about divine things. The dignity of our Lord’s person, the intensity of his sufferings, and the end for which he endured them, discover that things of a spiritual and divine nature are of infinite moment.

Of our ignorance and unbelief respecting these things. His sufferings confirm and seal his doctrine, and show the certain truth, and unspeakable importance of it, and the reasonableness of a serious study of it, of laying it to heart, and receiving it in faith.

58 *Cause, design, and benefit of Christ's sufferings.*

Of the disease of self-righteousness and self-confidence. For, if our righteousness could have saved us, and if we could safely have trusted therein, Christ needed not to have died. —

Of our love to sin and the commission of it. For how can we love him and continue the willing servants of the betrayer and murderer of the Son of God, our Saviour? How can we willingly commit sin, which is so great an evil in its own nature, that it could not be pardoned, unless expiated by the sufferings and death of the Son of God, and Lord of glory?—

Of our love to the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world. For how can we reasonably desire any of these in a world, where our Lord and Master “had not where to lay his head;” where he “was despised and rejected,” “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”—

Of self-indulgence, and self-seeking. Since his sufferings and death show that he did not seek himself, and he died for us, “that we might not live to ourselves.” (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.)

Of lukewarmness and sloth. For shall we be indifferent about, and slothful in the pursuit of what cost him his blood?—

Of our cowardice and fear of suffering. “Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves, likewise, with the same mind” (1 Pet. iv. 1.)

Of diffidence and distrust, with respect to the mercy of God, and his pardoning and accepting the penitent.—

Of an accusing conscience, and slavish fear of God, and of death and hell (Heb. ix. 13, 14.)

Of our general depravity and corruption of nature. Tit. ii. 14; Eph. v. 25—27.)

Of our weakness and inability; his sufferings having purchased for us “the Spirit of might.”—

Of our distresses and misery, both present and future. For his sufferings bear away our griefs, and carry our sorrows; they are an astonishing proof of God’s infinite love to all for whom he undertook; they lay the most solid foundation for the firmest confidence and most lively hope in him. They show that

“No man too largely from God’s love can hope,
If what he hopes, he labours to secure.”

XLII.

THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST, AND THE EFFECTS OF IT.

ISAIAH LIII. 10.

When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

As that time of the year is at hand, which the wisdom of our Church has set apart for the commemoration of the sufferings of Christ, and the atonement made for sin by them, and we are already entered on Passion Week, we who profess ourselves members of the Church of England, seem to be called to employ our meditations upon this subject; and if any of you are not members of that Church, yet you are, or profess to be, members of the Church of Christ, and, there-

fore, can have no objection to my engaging your attention to one of the most important branches of Christianity, which may truly be termed rather than any other, *Articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ*, "The pillar on which the Church stands, or with which it falls,"

It must be granted, indeed, that all professing Christians do not see the matter in this light. The atonement made by Christ, is a subject that has met with much objection, and even ridicule, from some in every age, since the commencement of the Christian æra. But this is no more than was foretold by the Prophet in this very paragraph, who being about to predict the humiliation and vicarious sufferings of the Messiah, and the effects of them. introduces the subject by demanding, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And it is attested by the Apostle, (1 Cor. i. 23,) "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The doctrine of the atonement is at this day denied by many, and misrepresented by more. But are we therefore to be silent concerning it? By no means. But as both the Prophet and Apostle, above quoted, bear testimony to the deep importance of it, so the more this doctrine is denied, ridiculed, or misrepresented, the more ought we to insist upon it, and testify, that "Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all."

Now, perhaps, we could not find any portion of Scripture better calculated to give us information on this subject, than this chapter of the Prophet Isaiah, which contains as clear an account of the sufferings of Christ, with their causes and effects, as might have been expected in a history of what was past, rather

than a prophecy of what was future. Bishop Burnet informs us that a comparison of this chapter with the account which the Evangelists have given of Christ's passion, was a means of convincing the witty and wicked Earl of Rochester.

That nobleman told Bishop Burnet that "Mr. Parsons, in order to his conversion, read to him the fifty-third of Isaiah, and compared that with our Saviour's passion, that he might there see a prophecy concerning it written many ages before it was done, which the Jews, that blasphemed Jesus Christ, still kept in their hands as a book divinely inspired." He said to me, says the Bishop, that "as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his mind and convince him, that he could resist no longer; for the words had an authority which did shoot like rays into his mind, so that he was not only convinced by the reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him that he did ever after firmly believe in his Saviour, as if he had seen him in the clouds. He had made it to be read so often to him, that he had got it by heart, and went through a great part of it in discourse with me with a sort of heavenly pleasure, giving his reflections upon it."

Now, of this whole chapter, the passage I have read as the subject of a discourse, seems to set the doctrine of the atonement in the clearest point of view.

Here we learn,

I. THAT THE SOUL OF THE MESSIAH WAS TO BE MADE
"AN OFFERING FOR SIN."

The word here used, **זָכָה**, signifies either *guilty*, or, by a figure, *an offering for guilt*. We may consider it in both senses.—*Guilty*. He was not in himself; guilty, but innocent, and perfectly so; (2 Cor. v. 21. Heb. vii. 26;) yet, he was accounted, or treated, as guilty. (2 Cor. v. 21.) The reason of this was, that

our sins were imputed to him, or "laid upon him;" that is, they were laid to his charge, and he was made accountable for them; (Isai. liii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 24;) "made a curse." (Gal. iii. 13.)—Hence he was made *an offering for sin*. Two things were to be done, that the glory of God might be fully displayed, in the redemption of man.

Sin must be pardoned, otherwise the sinner could not be saved.—It was necessary also it should be punished; otherwise, its evil could not appear, nor the Divine attributes escape impeachment; the law of God, which had forbidden sin, must be magnified, or the equity of his government asserted. Sin must, therefore, be pardoned in a way that marks and publishes the evil of the offence.—The sacrifice of bulls and goats, or of any creature inferior to man, was insufficient for this purpose. (Heb. x. 4.) Their nature had not sinned; their consent could not be asked. Being inferior to man, their lives were no compensation for the forfeited life of man.—Nor could any man atone for his own sins, or suffer a punishment adequate to their demerit, without suffering eternally, and to the utmost extent of his capacity. Much less could one man atone for many, or many for all.—It was necessary, therefore, one should suffer, who, although possessed of human nature, yet had a nature superior to man, and who could bear unlimited sufferings; sufferings adequate to the demerit of all human offences, in a limited time. This the Messiah did, whose Godhead supported his manhood, and enabled him to bear, partly in his body, and especially in his soul, a torture, an anguish so great as might give not only men, but angels, a proper view of the evil and bitterness of sin, and of the

purity, justice, and wrath of God in hating, condemning, and punishing it. Hence,

“O’er guilt how mountainous! with outstretch’d arms,
Stern Justice and soft smiling Love embrace,
Supporting in full majesty thy throne,
When seem’d its majesty to need support!
Or *that*, or man inevitably lost:
What but the fathomless of thought divine
Could labour such expedient from despair,
And rescue both? Both rescue! Both exalt!
O how are both exalted by the deed!
The wondrous deed! Or, shall I call it more?
A wonder in omnipotence itself!
A mystery no less to gods than men!”

No mere bodily sufferings could do this, and, therefore, “his soul” was made an “offering for sin.”—Not only his body or his life, but his *soul*. And what did he feel in this when all the sins of all mankind were laid upon him, and he voluntarily bore the guilt and blame of them, and saw himself answerable for the whole dishonour done by them to God! When he became liable to be arrested by Divine justice, and imprisoned in death and the grave, for the whole debt incurred by Adam’s posterity to their Maker! When he had a full view of all the evil of our sin, felt all its bitterness as if it had been committed by himself, it being committed by those whose nature he had taken, and whose kinsman he was! and when he bore the wrath of Almighty God due to it! See Matt. xxvi. 36—45. Comp. Mark xiv. 34—36; Luke xxii. 41—44. — — —

II. BY WHOM IT WAS TO BE MADE AN OFFERING.

By the Father; “when *thou* shalt make his soul an offering for sin.” (ver. 6, 10.) It was done by his

“determinate counsel.” (Acts ii. 23.) This does not excuse those who became the instruments of his death. The Devil was actuated by malice; the Jews by envy; Judas by covetousness; and Pilate by cowardice, for he wanted courage to protect one who was unjustly accused before him. But had not God delivered him up, and appointed him to be a sacrifice, they could not have hurt a hair of his head.

It was God who required an offering for sin; his purity, his justice, his truth, the authority of his law, the rights of his government, required it. His glory demanded it, as a consideration on account of which he might pardon sin, and save the sinner with honour to himself. (Rom. viii. 3; iii. 25, 26.) God provided it in mercy and love to mankind. (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10; Tit. iii. 4.) He provided even his Son, *ἰδιον υἱον*, *his own Son*, his only Son, his beloved, his best beloved, to be made flesh, to be poor, despised, afflicted, to die in ignominy and torture, for creatures, for men, who were *sinners, enemies, rebels!* (Rom. v. 6—10.)

“Thou most indulgent, most tremendous Power!
Still more tremendous for thy wondrous love,
That arms, with awe more awful thy command,
And foul transgression dips in seven-fold guilt!
How our hearts tremble at thy love immense!
In love immense, inviolably just!
Thou, rather than thy justice should be stain’d,
Did’st stain the cross, and work of wonders far
The greatest, that thy dearest far might bleed!”

III. THE EFFECTS WHICH SHOULD BE PRODUCED.

“He shall see his seed,”—a numerous race of sons and daughters, begotten by the Gospel among Jews and

Gentiles. (ch liv. 1; liii. 8; Psalm cx. 3.) Hence he is termed (Isai. ix. 6,) “the Father of the future age.” See the Vulgate; and Isai. viii. 18.—Sin been atoned for, and the demands of justice answered, Divine mercy is at liberty to pardon and regenerate penitent and believing sinners, and to give the Gospel Word, (Luke i. 78, 79,) and Spirit’s influence, that sinners may repent and believe. For “God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. v. 19.) Hence it is foretold, “he shall sprinkle many nations.” (Isai. lii. 15.)

“He shall prolong his days.”—His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, are here alluded to, whereby he obtained an everlasting life at God’s right hand. (Psal. xxi. 4.) The end of it is threefold. For a recompense of his own labours and sufferings. (Phil. ii. 9.) For the salvation of his seed, whose Prophet, Priest, and King; whose wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; whose Saviour, Protector, Judge, Rewarder, &c. he thus becomes. (Matt. xxv. 34.) And, finally, for the judgment, condemnation, and punishment of those that reject him, and are not his seed. (Matt. xxv. 41; Psalm cx. 1; Heb. x. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 25.)

“The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” By “the pleasure of the Lord,” is intended, the progress of truth and goodness, of wisdom, holiness, and happiness in the world, the advancement of God’s glory, and the salvation of mankind, the felicity of the righteous, and the destruction of the wicked. These are entrusted in his hands. “The government is upon

his shoulders." In his hands it "shall prosper." Through his wisdom, and power, and love, through his care and management, the exercise of his authority, and the communication of his grace, by executing the offices which he sustains, the cause of God and of virtue and happiness shall prevail, conquer, and triumph. (1 Cor. xv. 24; Col. ii. 15; Rev. xvii. 14.)

Hence we need not wonder that "he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied."—His sufferings were great, and his soul had hard travail in effecting man's redemption; whence arose a numerous seed. His travail was hard in the wilderness, when he was tempted of the Devil; in his labours, in order to teach and fulfil the whole will of God; in the opposition he met with from the Jews in his trial before Caiaphas and Pilate; in his agony in the garden, and sufferings upon the cross.—Yet, considering the forementioned, and other happy effects of that travail, considering that the best of causes was thereby promoted, salvation provided for man, God glorified, himself exalted in the glorified human nature, which he had assumed, he is fully and eternally satisfied in his great undertaking.—The causes of his satisfaction are his perfect knowledge and approbation of what is best; his benevolence to man, his zeal for the glory of God, and just regard to his own honour and happiness. (Isai. xlix. 4—6.)

INFERENCES.

Was it necessary that Christ should be made an offering for sin? How great then is its evil! How dreadful its effects! It not only drowned the old

world, brought fire and brimstone down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, caused the earth to open and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but it killed the Son of God! It is of so heinous a nature, that its guilt could not be expiated, so that it might be pardoned, consistently with the Divine perfections, without the sacrifice of so glorious a person. How great then will be the punishment of those, in the other world, who, by rejecting or neglecting this sacrifice, are not saved from sin!

Is God's holiness and justice so inviolable, and his laws so honourable, and the rights of his government so sacred, that such a sacrifice was required for the manifestation of his glory? Then, what a powerful call and motive have we here for reverence and fear, solemnity and awe!

Did God judge it proper that such a price as this should be paid for man's redemption? Then, how important, how valuable, are the souls of men!

"Know'st thou the importance,"

says the Poet,

"of a soul immortal?

Behold this midnight glory; worlds on worlds!

Amazing pomp! redouble the amaze;

Ten thousand add; add twice ten thousand more;

Then weigh the whole; *one* soul outweighs them all;

And calls th' astonishing magnificence

Of unintelligent creation poor."

Has the Father provided such an atonement? And is it actually made? Then, how great, how astonishing is his mercy and love! What a foundation is laid for confidence in him, and love to him in return? How certainly may the most guilty be forgiven, the

most polluted be cleansed, and the most wretched and abject be recovered! And who can doubt the willingness of God to “save to the very uttermost those that come unto him,” and to give any blessing needed by us? (Rom. viii. 32; v. 9, 10.)

Has God been thus kind and bountiful? Has he not withheld his Son, but given him to become incarnate, to suffer poverty, reproach, pain, ignominy, and death for your sakes? Then what a loud call upon your gratitude! What shall I render to the Lord for his benefits? We ought to be willing to render our property, our honour, our liberty, our ease, our life, if called to it —

Shall the pleasure of the Lord prosper in his hands? Then if it be your anxiety to know, experience, and do the will of the Lord, you may commit your cause to him.

Are you his seed? If so, rejoice; for he has prolonged his days for your benefit.—If not, tremble; for he is your judge.—

Does he see of the travail of his soul, and is he satisfied? Then, sympathize with him in his sufferings, and his satisfaction. Being conformed to the motives and ends for which he suffered and died on our behalf, let us become instances of the efficacy of his gracious undertaking, and objects of his joy in consequence of it. (Titus ii. 14.)

XLIII.

AN INVITATION TO PARTAKE OF GOSPEL
BLESSINGS.

ISAIAH LV. 1, 2.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

It is not without reason that Isaiah has obtained the title of the *Evangelical Prophet*; for, surely, there is as much of the Gospel in his prophecy, perhaps, as in any book, even of the New Testament. It is true, the former part of the book, to the end of the thirty-ninth chapter, refers chiefly to the temporal state of the Jews; their iniquities, their punishments, and their deliverances. And in that portion of it, included between the beginning of the fortieth to almost the close of the fifty-second chapter, the glad tidings of spiritual redemption and salvation by the Messiah are continually intermixed with, and represented, for the most part, under the figure of the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, which, as being the nearest event, seems to have been most in the eye of the Prophet. But, the from thirteenth verse of that chapter, to the end of the book, the prophecy appears to be wholly

confined to Gospel blessings and Gospel days. The coming of the Messiah, the character he should bear, the offices he should sustain, and the blessings he should confer upon Jew and Gentile, having been repeatedly and clearly predicted before, although often in figurative terms, and under types (typical persons and typical things) and shadows, he there begins to speak in plain language of the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ, and of the glory that should follow, first to the Gentiles, and then to the Jewish Church; about which the inspired Prophet is wholly occupied to the end of his work. He begins, I observe, with the Gentile Church, its great enlargement, and privileges, in this and the preceding chapter: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child, for more are the children of the desolate, than of the married wife, saith the Lord." (ch. liv. 1;) and then from chapter fifty-six to the middle of the fifty-ninth chapter, he largely predicts its declension and falling away under the man of sin, and even in the Protestant Church; and in the sixteenth verse of the fifty-ninth chapter, he predicts the revival of religion by God's own "arm," which probably respects the present day. This will be followed by the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles, (ver. 19,) "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against him." Then Israel shall be saved, (ver. 20, 21,) and the Jewish Church shall be rendered most glorious. (ch. lx.)

In the text, we have a most encouraging invitation to us Gentiles. Consider we,

I. TO WHOM THE INVITATION IS MADE.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth,”—“and he that hath no money.”—

Those who *thirst*, are invited. Thirst implies want, and, therefore, the needy are invited; all who need happiness. We naturally seek it in present things, in carnal pleasure, or worldly honour and wealth; but these things neither do nor can afford it. They cannot satisfy the immense desires of an immortal mind. They are uncertain, and hence, when we have attained them, we have constant care in keeping them, and fear of losing them. They are of short duration; we shall soon pass from them, and they from us. All, therefore, are invited to obtain what will make them happy.

Mankind are unhappy, because they are unholy. We have sinned and have lost the favour of God, his image, and fellowship with him; the true sources of happiness to man before the fall. Hence, in order to happiness, we want forgiveness of sins, acceptance with God, adoption, regeneration, entire sanctification, and the Holy Spirit to teach us how these blessings may be gained, and to strengthen and comfort us in the pursuit of them. Now, as all need these, all are invited.

Thirsty persons are sensible, keenly sensible, of their wants. Hence, those are especially invited, who are sensible of their need of these things.—

Those who are thirsty, feel a desire for refreshing draughts; a strong, constant and increasing desire. Such, therefore, are particularly welcome.—

The thirsty are uneasy, distressed, and restless till they drink, and can be satisfied with nothing else. So those who are uneasy, unhappy, and restless to obtain pardon, the Divine favour, a birth from above, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and will be satisfied with nothing else, that is, the “weary and heavy-laden,” are still more particularly called.

The thirsty are active, and will take pains to gain refreshment. These are most of all invited.

But suppose they be very guilty, and have lived in the neglect of all their duties to God and man, and the commission of all kinds of sins?—Still, they are welcome. Those, who have *no money*, no good works, no righteousness, if they only thirst, shall be welcome.

Suppose, at the present, they have no good qualities, no wisdom, no piety, no virtue, they are not humble as they should be, nor meek, submissive, thankful.—Still they may come; those who have no merit, no excellence of any kind, are invited.

Suppose, also, they have no strength, no ability to atone for their sins, or make amends for the past; to renew and change themselves for the present, or to be wise, holy, and righteous for the future. Still the Lord calls them; *He that hath no money*.

II. WHAT IT IMPLIES, OR THE NATURE OF THE INVITATION.

“Come to the waters” This may be interpreted, “Come to the keys, wharfs, and ports, on navigable rivers, where foreign commodities are imported.—

Happiness is naturally foreign to man, because he has sinned, because the Divine favour, a renovation of

mind, and communion with God, are of extrinsic origin and derivation. They are imported, (so to speak,) by Christ in the vessel of his body, by his merits. The port, whence they are procured, is the ordinances. The proclamation of the Gospel is gone forth through the nation, nay, through the earth. Navigable rivers and ports are dispersed through all countries, in some abounding more than others. And this is the case in our favoured land. The means of grace may be enjoyed in this country in great abundance. Here come and buy.—

Buy what you absolutely want. Buy what is of infinite value,—pardon of your sins, acceptance with God, adoption, regeneration, &c. Buy what will do you infinite good, will remove all your miseries, and make you happy, truly, continually, and lastingly happy; what will enrich you, elevate your nature in the highest degree, and make you most glorious. Buy an estate, an inheritance, a kingdom, a crown.

Come and buy for nothing; “without money and without price.” The blessings offered to you are invaluable; no price can be set upon them:

“Their value vast ungrasp’d by minds create.”

We are indeed, poor, and have nothing, but the blessings are already bought and paid for.—We may have them gratis, as free undeserved gifts.—And yet they shall be as much our own, as if bought and paid for by us.

Buy very cheap. You must part with clay, thick clay, that defiles, burdens, and destroys,—the world, and sin. You must part with poison, and buy food; you must part with rags, and buy costly and splendid

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clothing; you must part with chains, and buy crowns; you must part with disorders and death, and buy health and immortality. Again,

Come to the waters, and wash. Come, ye filthy; ye that are defiled with guilt, come to the "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;" ye that are defiled with the power and pollution, the ulcers and leprosy of sin, come and receive the Spirit of God, the washing of regeneration.

Come to the waters, and drink. Ye thirsty; come, and be refreshed with peace with God; peace of mind, and the consolations of God's Spirit; in "the times of refreshing from his presence." Come, ye weary, and "I will give you rest."

Come, and be healed. These are medicinal waters. The blood of Christ, the Spirit of God, the word of God, the waters of the Sanctuary, are intended for the cure of spiritual diseases. These heal the conscience of insensibility, the understanding of blindness, the will of perverseness. They heal the deafness, dumbness, blindness, lameness of our inward man.

Come and be quickened, and made immortal. These are *waters of life*. Drink of them, and live; yea, live for ever.

Fear not lest you should drink the waters dry. They shall increase continually, and impart their salutary effects to all who use them. (See Ezek. xlvii. 1—12.)

The waters, when you drink of them, shall become "milk;" sweet, balmy, and nourishing. Such are the truths and promises of the Gospel; such the grace and love of God, in Jesus Christ.

The “milk” shall become “wine,” cheering, invigorating, strengthening. Gospel truths and promises, God’s grace and love shall be productive of hope, joy, great and strong consolation.

It is not enough that we come and look at the blessings which are offered; we must partake of them. We must *buy* them; they must be ours. We must *eat* them; applying them, in their several particulars, for our own use and benefit. But how? By faith. We must hear; “hearken diligently.” Come, not only to the ordinances, but “unto me,” by faith in prayer.

III. THE ARGUMENTS WHEREBY THE INVITATION IS ENFORCED.

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?”

The rich live by their money; and the poor by labour. Both are gone out of the way of truth and happiness: The things which men pursue, the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world are not *bread*, they are not the proper food of the soul, are not suited to its nature, are not calculated to fill its capacity, and supply its wants; to refresh it, to restore its wasted strength, to preserve its health, to nourish and make it grow. They do not invigorate, strengthen, or improve it.—

Neither do these things *satisfy* us. They do not even at present; but if they did, we have no hold upon them; they are perfectly uncertain, and will certainly leave us, when we shall be in greatest need of consolation.

Wherefore, then, do ye follow after these things? Is it reasonable? Is it wise? Is it for your honour? Is it for your interest? Is it your duty? Quite the reverse. — — Is it necessary? Cannot you do otherwise? Yes; the grace of God is sufficient for you, and free for you.

But, do you object, we have nothing better to pursue, and must be active. Not so. Come unto me, and your soul shall live; shall be quickened, in the possession of the favour of God, a union with him, his image, his nature, fellowship with him, holiness inward and outward, happiness present and eternal, according to an everlasting covenant.

Wherefore, “Ho, every one that thirsteth,” all of you in general, and every one in particular, “come ye to the waters,” &c. — —

XLIV

SEEKING THE LORD EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

ISAIAH LV. 6, 7.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

THE Prophet having discoursed at length on the humiliation and sufferings, and the subsequent exaltation and glory of the Messiah; (ch. liii;) and having foretold the great enlargement of the church, by the admission of the Gentiles to it, (ch. liv,) in the beginning of this chapter, he delivers a general invitation, in the name of Jehovah, to all descriptions of persons, conscious of their spiritual indigence, to come and partake of the Gospel blessings, and accompanies it with a promise that this invitation shall be successful, (ver. 1—5,) and, in the verses now before us, the Prophet earnestly exhorts the wicked of all nations to seek the knowledge and favour of God by repentance and prayer, adding the most gracious assurance of his readiness to show “mercy and abundantly pardon.”

But to enter into the meaning and force of the exhortation, let us consider,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SEEKING THE LORD.

It is to seek the KNOWLEDGE of the Lord, lost by the fall — We do not mean the knowledge of his being, that he is; or, of his nature, what he is, a *Spirit*. This, however, the heathen did not know, or they would not have “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” (Rom. i. 23.) Nor could hypocrites, if they were sensible of his spiritual nature, hope to please him by ceremonies, or any mere external services.—Nor do we mean the knowledge of his attributes, such as his eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, his infinite wisdom, equity and goodness; nor of the relations in which he stands to his creatures in general, or to mankind in particular, as our Creator, Governor, and Benefactor. The works of creation, and the dispensations of Providence, manifest God in these respects. (Rom. i. 20.)—But we mean that knowledge of him which is by supernatural revelation, and communicated through his word, especially “the Word made flesh,” and his Spirit. (John i. 18; Eph. i. 17; 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 John v. 20; Matt. xi. 27.)

This is that acquaintance with him,—in his glory and majesty, producing the fear of him, which we have not by nature; (Rom. iii. 18;) a fear of reverence, a fear of awfulness, a filial fear of offending him.—In his holiness and justice, which produces humility. (Job xlii. 6; xl. 4.)—In his mercy and grace, (Jer. xxxi. 34,) which produces confidence (Psalm ix. 10.)—In his love and goodness, which produces returns of love, not only esteem, and desire, but grateful, complacen-

tial love, attended with zeal for his glory, and obedience to his will.

It is to seek HIS FAVOUR, lost also by the fall, for "by nature we are the children of wrath;" (Eph. ii. 3;) and to be "accepted," or taken into favour. (Eph. i. 6.)

It is to seek HIS IMAGE, in which man was created, (Gen. i. 27,) but which he has lost, being earthly, sensual, devilish. (Jam. iii. 15.) We are to "put off concerning the former conversation, the old man," &c. (Eph. iv. 22—24.)

It is to seek COMMUNION WITH HIM. This we have not by nature, "being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us;" (Eph. iv. 18; Col. i. 21;) but we may attain it. (2 Cor. vi. 16; John xiv. 23; Eph. ii. 21, 22; 1 John i. 3.)

It is to seek the EVERLASTING VISION AND ENJOYMENT OF HIM. (Matt. v. 8; 1 John iii. 2; Rev. xxi. 3—7; xxii. 3, 4.)

II. HOW, OR IN WHAT WAY, THE LORD MUST BE SOUGHT.

As a preparation for seeking him, we must be sensible of our entire, or great want of him in all these respects; of the knowledge of him; of his favour of his image; of communion with him, and the enjoyment of him.—We must be sensible of the excellency of these blessings; of their attainableness; of the absolute necessity of attaining them, in order to our salvation present and eternal.

We must feel desires; earnest, increasing, restless desires after him. Thus David, Psal. xlii. 1; lxiii. 1; Isai. xxvi. 8, 9.)

Conscious these blessings before mentioned are God's gifts, we must seek them in prayer; (Matt. vii. 7;) and not only in *mental* prayer, though this be important, but in *vocal*. We must "call upon him."—In private. (Matt. vi. 6.) We mean not the *saying* our prayers; but really presenting our requests to God, for blessings which we know we want, and must obtain, or perish. We must pray sincerely, earnestly, importunately, perseveringly, and in faith, nothing doubting.—In our families, also, we must join in prayer to God.—In social meetings.—And in the public congregation; and, therefore, we should take care to be present in time.

But in the use of these means we must be consistent. The "wicked" must "forsake his way;"* his ungodly, unrighteous, intemperate way. (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) "The unrighteous man," Heb. אִישׁ אֲוֵן (*the man of iniquity*; of injustice, fraud, violence, oppression; "his thoughts," his deceitful imaginations, that these things are reconcileable with religion, or that he can finally prosper in such a way, or escape the Divine vengeance.—*The man of vanity*; who pursues things unattainable, unsatisfactory, uncertain, transitory; "his thoughts," his delusive schemes, and contrivances to obtain happiness in this way. Or, let him who vainly thinks to enlighten his own mind, expiate his own sins, change his own nature, or do the will of God of himself, in other words, who vainly "goes about to establish his own righteousness, not submitting himself to the righteousness of God," desist from such thoughts. And let him turn to the Lord, and expect these things only from him, and seek his happiness only in him.

* See Simons, or Buxtorf, on רִשְׁעַ.

We must turn to him in judgment,—in choice,—in intention,—resolution,—affection;—in faith, believing his truths, declarations, promises in Christ, and coming to God only through him.

III. WHEN WE MUST SEEK THE LORD.

“While he may be found.”

—In life, with which, when it closes, will terminate all opportunities of seeking the Lord.—In health, not “in the floods of great waters.” (Psal. xxxii. 6.)—In youth, the period of life more favourable than any other for obtaining true religion, and wherein a special promise is given, for the encouragement of those that begin early to seek the Lord. (Eccles. ix. 10.)—At least, while our day of grace lasts, and “he is near,” y his Word, and the ordinances he has instituted among his people, and by his Spirit, convincing, alarming, drawing, assisting us in our endeavours.

We should remember, we cannot tell how long our day of grace may continue. With many it has ended on this side the grave. It was so with the Israelites in the wilderness, (Psal. xcv. 8, 9, 11,) and those who rejected our Lord’s ministry, to whom he said, “Ye shall die in your sins.” (John viii. 21.) Thus we may be given over to hardness and impenitence of heart, if we neglect to improve our present means, and the grace given to us. (Prov. i. 28, 29.)

We shall notice,

IV THE GRACIOUS PROMISE MADE TO SUCH AS SEEK HIM IN THAT WAY, AND AT THAT TIME.

“He will have mercy upon him.” Hebrew, “He will have the bowels of a mother to a child.” Although past sins may have been many, great, aggravated, long continued; although present corruption, temptation, and habits of sin be very strong; although hinderances and oppositions be many; and apparently insurmountable; he will “pardon” us freely and fully.—He will subdue our iniquities, and “renew us in the spirit of our minds.”—He will “strengthen us with might in our inner man,” and, “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus,” we shall more than overcome all that oppose. (2 Tim. ii. 1; Rom. viii. 37.)

“He will *abundantly* pardon.” Hebrew, “will multiply to pardon.” When such as have been guilty of very great wickedness, come to have a serious sense of their sins, and of the holiness and justice of God, they are almost inconsolable, and are wont to think their guilt too aggravated to be forgiven; hence the Prophet makes use of strong terms, and to encourage them, and lead them to repentance, he assures them God will multiply pardons as their sins have been multiplied. (Rom. v. 20)—He will also again forgive, if we fall off and return to him in repentance.—“He will heal our backsliding.” — —

XLV

THE REDEEMER COMING TO HIS CHURCH,
AND THE COVENANT ENSURING THE
CONTINUANCE OF HIS SPIRIT AND WORD
WITH IT.

ISAIAH LIX. 20, 21.

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

ALTHOUGH the book of the Prophet Isaiah does not pursue from the beginning a connected chain of prophecy, according to the events that should take place in the world, or in the Church, like the Revelation by St. John, but is, rather, a collection of distinct visions and prophecies: (see, as examples, ch. i. ii. iii. iv. v. xiii. xv. xvii. &c. ;) yet in some parts of it, we have connected chains of prophecy continued through several chapters. This is the case particularly from ch. xl., where the Prophet begins to predict the deliverance of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, of the Gentiles from their miserable state of darkness and idolatry, and of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death; and especially from ch. lii. 13, where he begins ex-

pressly, and almost exclusively, to speak of the Messiah, and his Church, from which place a connected and luminous prophecy is given, at least to the end of chapter lx.*

In the chapter from whence the text is taken, and the preceding, the Prophet had represented the general decay of real religion, which would take place even in the Christian Church. But from the sixteenth verse he foretells a great revival, which would be effected by the immediate "arm," or power of God, who is jealous for the honour of his name and truth. And, in the words proposed for our present consideration, applied by St. Paul to the future conversion of the Jewish nation, after "the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in," (Rom. xi. 26,) and applicable, as we conceive, to the increasing diffusion of christian piety at this time, probably leading on to its universal prevalence in the world, the Prophet says, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion," &c.—Let us contemplate,

I. THE PERSON OF WHOM THE FATHER SPEAKS, AND HIS COMING.

"The Redeemer," (Hebrew **גואל**) the kinsman, who, by assuming our nature, is nearly related to us. (Heb. ii. 11, 17) To him as our kinsman, the right of redemption belongs.—

We are poor debtors, liable to be sold, by the justice of our offended God, into perpetual slavery, and cast

* See the introduction to Plan xliii. The Preacher should here refer to certain verses in the several chapters, and show the general outline of the Prophecy.

into prison; but he redeems our persons, our souls and bodies, by price. (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; 1 Pet. i. 19.)—

We had forfeited and lost our inheritance, *viz.* the favour and image of God, and communion with him in this world, and the everlasting enjoyment of him hereafter. This, also, he redeems by price.—

He rescues us out of slavery by his power; from bondage to Satan, sin, and the fear of death.—

And he avenges our death on our grand enemy, the Devil. (Heb. ii. 14.)—

“Shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.”

The coming which is here spoken of, is for the above purposes, and not chiefly his coming in the flesh, which does not so well suit the context. It is his spiritual coming which is meant; his coming in his kingdom.—To the Jews, as a people, to “turn away ungodliness from Jacob,” as the LXX read it, and St. Paul in Rom. xi. 26.—To his Church, in general, often called Zion, Jacob, and Israel; to introduce the Millennium, and spread religion through all the world. This is represented, Rev. xix. 11—16.—To the hearts of his people. (John xiv. 18, 19, 23; Rev. iii. 20.) Then have we “Christ in us the hope of glory;” Christ “dwelling in our hearts by faith.” (Eph. iii. 14, 17; Gal. ii. 20, 21.)

II. THE BLESSINGS CONSEQUENT ON HIS COMING IN THESE SENSES.

“My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the

mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."

These are the words of the Father to the Redeemer.

The Spirit is described as "upon Christ," because, even as man, he had the Spirit without measure. (Isai. xi. 2; lxi. 1; John iii. 34; Rev iii. 1.)—It was foretold he should baptize his followers with it. (Mark i. 8; Luke iii. 16; John i. 32.)—He hath procured it for them, by expiating their sins, and cancelling their debts.—He hath received it for them. (Psal lxviii, 18; Acts ii. 33.)—He hath promised it to them. (Acts i. 4; Luke xxiv. 49; John xiv. xv. xvi.)—By this, and by this alone do we become his; his subjects, servants, disciples, friends, brethren, spouse, branches in him; (John xv. 1;) members. (1 Cor. xii. 12—27; Rom. xii. 5; Eph. i. 22, 23.)—

We cannot belong to him in these respects,—unless we know him, (John x. 14,) and we cannot know him, without the illumination of his Spirit. (Matt. xi. 27; Gal. i. 16; John xvi. 14; Eph. i. 17.)—Unless we love him; (1 Cor. xvi. 22; Gal. v. 6;) but love is the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. v. 22.)—Unless we obey him, (2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Rom. xiv. 7; John xv. 14; xiv. 23; Heb. v. 9;) but this we cannot do without his Spirit. (John xv. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 5.)—Unless we have an interest in him, as a wife in her husband. This is by his Spirit. (1 Cor. xii. 13.)—Unless we have union with him; which is also by his Spirit. (1 Cor. vi. 17.)—Unless we have his mind in us. This again we obtain by his Spirit.—Unless we be new creatures. (2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. iv. 21—24.) This also we must obtain by his Spirit.

Hence it appears in what respect, and for what purposes, the Spirit, that was on Christ, must be on us.

He cannot, indeed, be on us exactly in the same sense in which he was on Christ; for Christ was the wisdom of God incarnate, and had no ignorance; he was “the Holy One of God.” and consequently without sin. But the Spirit must be on us,—as a Spirit of truth, enabling us to discern, to understand to believe, and to hold fast the truth as it is in, and was revealed by Jesus, who was “full of truth”.—As a Spirit of grace; (Heb. x. 29;) that we may relish, lay to heart, and be duly influenced by the truth. Christ was “full of grace.” (See Psal. xlv. 2; John i. 16.)—As a Spirit of life, (Rom. viii. 2;) begetting in us living faith. and making us alive to God by a spiritual life.—As a Spirit of power, (Hebrew גבורה Isai. xi. 2,) of might of manly fortitude and courage, enabling us to encounter all the difficulties of our christian course.—As a Spirit of liberty, from the guilt and power of sin, from the devil, the world, and the flesh; of liberty in our access to God, through the Spirit of Adoption.—As a Spirit of purity, or sanctification. (2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 2.)—As a Spirit of comfort and joy. (John xiv. 26; Acts ix. 31; Rom. xv. 13.)

“My words which I have put in thy mouth.” &c.

This seems to refer to the Revelation, which he, as the Incarnate Word was to declare. (Deut. xviii. 15.) And this is the object of faith, the ground of confidence, and the subject matter of the chief study and conversation of every true Christian; in its doctrines, precepts, exhortations, promises, threatenings, warnings.

Every true disciple of Christ speaks the language of Canaan; a language like that of Christ. He speaks words of instruction, of reproof, of counsel, of exhor-

tation, of encouragement. He holds forth the word of life. (Phil. ii. 16.)

Now the Spirit and word of Christ together, form his Church, and are its foundation; they form each believer, and will be with his Church in all ages. Both are absolutely necessary to its existence and support.

III. THE PERSONS TO WHOM THESE BLESSINGS ARE PROMISED; THE WAY IN WHICH THEY ARE OBTAINED; AND THE CERTAINTY OF OBTAINING THEM IN THAT WAY.

They are promised to those that are “in Jacob,” members of Christ’s Church. — — To those that “turn from transgression.”—To those who are the “seed” of Christ by faith. (Gal. iii. 9, 26.) — —

They must be obtained by faith in prayer. “Ask, and ye shall receive.” (Matt. vii. 7—11; Ezek. xxxvi. 37.)

The certainty of obtaining them may be found in God’s covenant and testament. — —

XLVI.

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST OVER ALL THE
ENEMIES OF HIS PEOPLE.

ISAIAH LXIII. 1, 2.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine fat?

THE Prophecy of Isaiah is generally allowed to contain the sublimest writing which has ever appeared in the world. For loftiness of thought, and magnificence of expression, it excels, in general, not only all mere human compositions, but even every other part of the inspired volume. Now this passage is certainly one of the most grand and striking in his prophecy. You will easily observe, that it is strongly figurative. It represents a mighty conqueror returning from the conquest of his enemies, in glorious apparel and in great triumph; his garments being stained with the gore, and deeply dyed with the blood of the slain.

The passage has been supposed by some, to represent a great victory obtained by the Israelites over the Edomites, and over Bozrah, a strong and fortified city of Edom. And many learned interpreters have thought that Judas Maccabeus, and his victories, make the subject of it. But “what claim Judas can have to so great

an honour, will" as Bishop Lowth has justly observed, "be very difficult to make out; or how the attributes of the great Person, introduced here, can possibly suit him. Could Judas call himself the 'Announcer of righteousness,' so the Bishop renders it, 'mighty to save?' Could he talk of the 'day of vengeance,' being 'in his heart;' and 'the year of his redeemed' being 'comes;' or that 'his own arm wrought salvation for him?' Besides, what were the great exploits of Judas in regard to the Idumeans? He overcame them in battle, and slew twenty thousand of them. And John Hyrcanus, his brother, Simon's son and successor, gave them another defeat some time afterwards, and compelled them by force to become proselytes to the Jewish religion, and to submit to circumcision; after which, they were incorporated with the Jews, and became one people with them." But, "are these events adequate to the Prophet's lofty prediction? Was it so great an action to win a battle with considerable slaughter of the enemy; or to force a whole nation by dint of the sword, into Judaism," that it should be celebrated in such magnificent figures, and glowing language? Add to this, that the Idumea of the Prophet's time was quite a different country from that which Judas conquered. For, during the Babylonish captivity, the Edomites were driven out of their own country by the Nabothians, and took possession of the southern parts of Judah, the capital of which was, not Bozrah, but Hebron, and this was the Idumea which Judas conquered.*

From these considerations we must conclude, with the learned Bishop, that this prophecy has not the least relation to Judas Maccabeus, and that there is "no

* See Prideaux, ad An. 740 and 165.

event in history to which, from its importance and circumstances, it can be applied, unless, perhaps, to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity, which in the Gospel is called 'the coming of Christ,' and the 'days of vengeance,' (Matt. xxiv. 16—28; Luke xxi. 22.)" That Christ is the person spoken of in this prophecy, may be concluded, because St John, in the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation, has applied the figurative language of the Prophet to him, and represented him as "treading the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God," that is, crushing his enemies, as one that treadeth the wine-press, crusheth the grapes, and with his "garments dipped in blood." And if the enemies here meant must be external and visible enemies, and this prophecy must have a literal accomplishment, it is most probable that it yet remains to be fulfilled, and that the subject of it is no other than that celebrated by St. John in the chapter above quoted and the following, *viz.*, the destruction of Antichrist, or of Gog and Magog, spoken of by Ezekiel in ch. xxxviii. of his prophecy. This is the greatest, and last visible enemy of Christ's Church, and will be destroyed with the most exemplary and signal vengeance.

But why must we understand this prophecy literally? Why may we not take it in a parabolical and figurative sense, and suppose that Edom and Bozrah, the natural and ancient enemies of God's people stand, in prophetic language, as Egypt and Babylon do in other instances, for the enemies of God's people in all ages, and, that the victory celebrated is that obtained by Christ, through his sufferings and death, over our spiritual enemies? It is certain that this sense best

suits the context, which relates to the redemption by Christ, and the fruit thereof in the salvation of his Church. And the compilers of our Liturgy seem to have understood the Prophet in this sense, as appears by their appointing this portion of Holy Writ to be read in Passion Week. The Prophet, in the name of the Church of God, having a foresight of the Messiah's resurrection, or of his ascension, when "he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men," demands, "Who is this that cometh from Edom," &c.; or, rather, one of the heavenly host, upon his ascension into heaven, inquires, "Who is this?" Thus the passage will resemble that in Psalm xxiv. 74; "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

But, whether in agreement with the intention of the passage or not, to this most important subject, *viz.* Christ's victory over our enemies, I beg leave to accommodate the words, and to use them in illustration of it. And I do it the rather, because the season of the year now calls us to commemorate that victory obtained by the death and resurrection, and displayed by the ascension of our exalted Lord into heaven.

It will be necessary,

I. TO TAKE A VIEW OF THE ENEMIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE, WHO MUST BE CONQUERED BEFORE THEY CAN BE SAVED.

These include—The DEVIL; who is to be dreaded on account of his power and fierceness. Hence he is

termed "a lion."—His subtlety, wiles, devices, snares: on account of which he is called "a serpent."—His long experience; from which he has the name of "an old serpent."—His malice, which gives him the name of "Satan."—His invisibility; not being discerned by the eyes of the body, nor his temptations, perhaps, distinguished from the natural operations of our own minds; which gives him great advantage over us.—His spiritual and active nature, and the legions under his command, which give him a kind of omniscience and omnipresence.

To effect his purposes against us, he makes use of—
The **WORLD**.—Of its prosperity, as riches, honours, pleasures, to burden the mind with care, choke the seed of grace and draw the affections and even thoughts from God.—Of adversity, as poverty, reproach, affliction, and pain, to discourage, enervate, cast down, and destroy the confidence, peace, and patience of the soul, and to stop its progress, and prevent it from persevering, if not from setting out in God's ways.

—The **FLESH**. That is, either our animal nature itself, as our senses, by which temptation and sin enter, our appetites, our passions;—or rather the corruption of our nature. This, like tinder, or gunpowder, is apt to catch the sparks of Satan's temptations. How great is the use he makes of our depravity, to lead us into inward and outward sin! — —

This is the fourth enemy **SIN**.—Past sin; hence arises guilt.—Present sin; its power and pollution.—Future sin; through the disorder and weakness, we have acquired by the transgression, and our inability to perform perfect and unsinning obedience.

94. *Victory of Christ over his People's Enemies.*

—**DEATH**; the last enemy; the Bozrah; the strong hold of Satan.—*Spiritual death*; namely, the separation of the soul from God, the loss of his favour, image, and fellowship with him.—*Temporal death*; the separation of the soul and body, and the return of the body to dust and rottenness.—*Eternal death*; the everlasting separation of both soul and body from God, and their banishment into the lake of fire among devils. The end of all Satan's temptations is to bring man to this, the citadel of his eternal kingdom.

II. TO CONSIDER THE VICTORY CHRIST HATH OBTAINED OVER THESE ENEMIES.

Over Satan.—Being, as man, armed with faith, and the finger, or power of God, he cast out devils day by day, and triumphed over “all the power of the enemy.” Nay, he enabled his disciples to cast them out. (Luke x. 17—19.) And, by the preaching of his Gospel, and the effusion of his Spirit, he struck dumb all the heathen oracles; thus “spoiling principalities and powers, and making a show of them openly.” (Col. ii. 15.)—Armed with the “breast plate of righteousness,” (ch. lix. 17.) the girdle of truth, and faithfulness. (Isai. xi. 5,) the helmet of hope, (Heb. xii. 2,) the “shield of faith,” in the Divine declarations and promises given him, and “the sword of the Spirit, the word of God,” saying, “Thus it is written,” and above all, “praying always with all prayer;” (See Eph. vi. 14—18;) he withstood all the subtlety, and escaped all the wiles and snares of the Devil and his angels, (Matt. iv. 1—11,) though devised and employed against him, with

the utmost malice, with implacable fury, and unwearied diligence. He conquered the Devil by triumphing,

Over the world, (John xii. 31; xvi. 11.) By faith in the invisible world, and in the rewards and punishments of it; by confidence in, and love to, his invisible and eternal Father, and communion with him; and by the heavenly Spirit and Divine nature of which he was possessed, and of which he was full, he prevailed against all temptations from worldly riches and power, (Matt. iv. 9,) from honours, (John vi. 15,) from prosperity, or adversity. (John xvi. 33.) Thus he showed us how we must overcome. —

Over the flesh. His nature was not corrupt; nevertheless he had a body with senses, appetites, and passions, like our own, and was “compassed about with infirmity;” but, armed by the power of the Spirit, and his Divine nature upholding the human, living also a life of continual self-denial, he was not hindered, or drawn aside from the great work he was to fulfil, or seduced into sin, the next enemy.

Over sin.—He conquered it, for he “resisted it unto blood,” and never committed it.—He encountered all the sins of the human race which were imputed to him, laid upon him, and punished in him (Isai iii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 24; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. ix. 28.) He atoned for, or expiated them, and put them away. (John i. 29; Heb. ix. 26.) He hath by his death removed their guilt, so that “God is in him reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” (2 Cor. v. 19;) and, through his resurrection and ascension, he hath obtained for us that word and Spirit, that truth and grace, which breaks their power, and puts an end to their defilement. (Psal. lxxviii. 18; Acts ii. 33.)

Over death.—Satan and his angels undoubtedly exerted all their power and policy to bring Christ under the dominion of death. Hence he is said to have “put into the heart of Judas to betray him;” John xiii. 2;) and the Lord Jesus said to the Jews, “This is your hour and the power of darkness,” (Luke xxii. 53,) when they were plotting his destruction. Probably Satan hoped, by quenching the light of the world, to seal up mankind in perpetual darkness; by killing the Prince of Life, to keep Adam’s posterity in eternal death; and by destroying the only Saviour of lost mankind, to make their everlasting destruction sure. To outwit, baffle, and confound the most subtle plots and policy of hell, and to mortify and torment that proud spirit. Christ suffered him to go even so far. The Devil was permitted to bring him even into death; to separate his soul from his body; and in some sense, for a season, to separate him from God. Nay, he descended into hell; not, indeed, into a place of punishment, as some have thought, (Luke xxiii. 43,) but as the Hebrew and Greek signify into *אδης*, the invisible and separate state. And yet the very means whereby Satan thought to establish his kingdom, overthrows it; and the means whereby Satan expected to destroy mankind, saves them! Having imprisoned the Prince of Life in death, he could not hold him there. (Acts ii. 24; Col. ii. 15.)

This leads me,

III. TO CONSIDER THE MEANS WHEREBY CHRIST HATH OBTAINED THIS VICTORY; AND WHAT IT HATH COST HIM.

He overcame,

By his DIVINE NATURE. "Travelling in the greatness of his strength." Hence he excelled Satan in his power and wisdom, by his superior strength and wisdom;—he exceeded his malice by love. — —

Hence his atonement is available; he could not be held under death; and uniting our humanity to his deity, he opened an intercourse between earth and heaven.

By his HUMAN NATURE. Hereby he made himself visible to men's eyes, could teach them familiarly and meekly, and set us an example; hereby he became our kinsman, and obtained the right of redemption for us; learned to sympathize with us; possessed a body to offer, and could suffer and die, of which otherwise he would have been incapable.—

By his INNOCENCE. Without this he could have done nothing. He would have deserved to suffer for his own sins, and Satan, sin, and death, must have finally prevailed over him. But, though innocent, he suffered.—

By his SUFFERINGS. These were great indeed, both in his soul and body, while he engaged in the arduous conflict for us.—(See ver. 3—6.) — —

They were no despicable and feeble enemies with which he contended. They manifested their strength in his "dyed garments," the tearing and mangling of the nature wherewith he had clothed himself. There was also "none with him." No mortal ever overcame those enemies of himself, but Jesus. He fully over-

came, and delivered his people without their help. The life-blood of their enemies was upon his garments.—That the innocent Son of God hath suffered, is a demonstration that the sins of those, for whom he suffered, are atoned for. How strange the victory! He conquered by being overcome; he destroyed sin by bearing the charge and penalty of sin, and death by dying.

By his RESURRECTION from the dead. This sealed his doctrine, showed sin was expiated, opened the way for our receiving the Spirit, manifested his victory over death, and ensured immortality to us, and invested him with supreme power over every foe.

**IV TO OBSERVE THAT, IN CONSEQUENCE OF IT,—
“HE SPEAKS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, MIGHTY TO SAVE.”**

“He speaks in righteousness.” This is to be understood in several ways.—In mercy. (Psal cxii. 9.)—In Justice; which by his victory is honoured, though sinners are saved. (Psal. lxxxv. 10; Rom. iii. 21.)—In truth; the promises in him being fulfilled. (Luke i. 72.)

—In mediatorial righteousness. His obedience unto death is the foundation of our hope. (Rom. x. 4; Jer. xxiii. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30.)

Hence he is “mighty to save.” Whom? Lost sinners; all being naturally lost in ignorance, guilt, depravity, weakness, and misery. (Rom. iii. 10—18.)

He saves them,—from the ignorance of sin, by his word and Spirit; the former of which he sealed; the latter he procured.—From the guilt of sin; having satisfied Justice, and made way for Mercy. (Rom. iii. 23, &c.)—From the power of sin, by his word and Spirit.—

From the nature of sin. (Acts iii. 26; 1 John i. 9; Heb. vii. 25.)—From the flesh; on his part by the Spirit; on our part by self denial, mortification, watchfulness.—from the world; (John xvi. 33;) by faith, love, a new birth, a heavenly mind. (1 John v. 4, 5; ii. 15; Col. iii. 2.)—From the Devil. By the same armour with which Christ overcame, he enables us to withstand his power, and baffle his subtlety. He is more experienced in saving than Satan is in destroying. His love exceeds Satan's hatred. The armies of heaven are more powerful than those of hell.—From death; (Heb. ii. 14;) from the fear of it, and from death itself.

On our part—we must die to all confidence in the flesh. (Phil. iii. 3.)—We must confide in him.—We must regard and hold him precious, who hath done and suffered so much for us.—We must be subject, and obedient to him. (Rom. xiv. 9; Heb. v. 9.) — —

INFERENCE.

How great the guilt and misery of those who, after all Christ hath done, to procure a victory for them, live and die under the power of their enemies! — —

XLVII.

INQUIRY INTO THE WANT OF SPIRITUAL
HEALTH.

JEREMIAH VIII. 22.

*Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?
Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

It was the lot of Jeremiah, whose prophecy is full of mourning, lamentation, and wo, to discharge his office in a very dark and distressing time; the King and people were extremely corrupt and wicked, and the Divine judgments were coming upon them with a full tide. These things the Prophet describes and laments in all parts of his book. Thus, in the paragraph preceding the text, having shown the astonishing stupidity and obstinacy of the people who neither regarded God's oracles, his providences, nor their own consciences, but in the face of desolating judgments, persisted in their wicked practices; and described the great confusion and consternation, into which the invasion of the Chaldeans would throw the whole land; the Prophet bitterly bewails their miserable and hopeless state. (Ver. 18—22.) “For the hurt of the daughter of my people,” says he. “am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead...?”

Gilead was noted for balm, or balsam. We find Joseph was sold to Ishmaelitish merchants, who came

from Gilead “bearing spicery, and balm, and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.” (Gen. xxxvii. 25.) The word rendered *balm*, is used as a common name for many of those oily substances which flow out from certain trees spontaneously, or by incision, and are of considerable use in medicine or surgery. Such productions abounding in Gilead, made many physicians resort there. And from hence the Gileadites and Arabians excelled in physic. The Prophet then must be understood as expressing his grief in behalf of his countrymen, in metaphorical language, signifying the inveteracy of their spiritual disease, and the obstinacy of their hearts. His words, imply that the people either would not come to the physician, or their distemper was incurable. Though they wanted not Prophets and Teachers, nor any spiritual means flowing down amongst them, they did not apply them for their moral improvement, and would not return to God, from whom they had revolted!

The words are but too applicable to us as a nation. We abound with balm and physicians, with means of grace of all kinds, and teachers of religion, and yet, we are not reformed in our manners, nor delivered from painful apprehensions of the threatened judgments of God. What reason have we, therefore, for humiliation and sorrow!

But, it is not that I may enlarge on a subject of this kind, that I have read these words as the ground of a discourse. I mean to apply them to the spiritual health of individuals among the professors of religion, signified here by the “daughter of God’s people.” In this view, we will inquire,

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THEIR "HEALTH," THEIR SPIRITUAL HEALTH, AND HOW IT APPEARS THAT THEY ARE OUT OF HEALTH, AND IN WHAT RESPECTS?

The body is in health, when every member, sense, organ, and every part of its complicated structure, performs its office; when it does so freely without any obstruction; when it does so without putting us to pain or inconvenience.

This may be exemplified with respect to the stomach, bowels, the head, the nervous system, or animal powers; the heart, arteries, and veins, or vital powers; the senses, as eyesight, hearing, &c. — —

In like manner the soul is in health, when every power and faculty does its office with freedom, ease, and pleasure.

When the understanding, that faculty whereby the mind receives her knowledge and reasons upon it, discerns things in a just light, and compares, and judges respecting them according to their real nature and value; when the memory and imagination, which should assist the understanding in its operations, by reviving former ideas, and representing objects to the mind in their true colours, lend their aid willingly in every great and virtuous effort of that faculty; when the will, which should be directed by the higher powers, and choose the good and refuse the evil, immediately and steadily prefers what is best; when the affections, which were intended to enliven and animate us in pursuing the things connected with our highest interests, are wisely tempered and called forth, and fix themselves only upon objects worthy of our love or hatred, grief or delight. — —

Now this is not the case with the generality of professing Christians, and not perfectly the case with almost any, if it be with any. The understanding does not perform its office; it does not apprehend, reason, and judge of Divine truths, of their nature and im-

portance, as it ought. The will does not readily choose, and resolutely adhere to the chief good. The affections are not excited, as they ought, by those things which are adapted to move them; they do not embrace and cleave to perfect beauty and infinite goodness; but are irregular, going out after unlawful objects, and inordinately embracing such as are lawful in an undue degree. The memory, the conscience, the temper, the appetites, also, are disordered. — —

In mentioning symptoms of the body's sickness, as illustrative of that of the soul, we may observe that the body is said to be out of health when there is no relish for the enjoyments of life; no ability for the duties of life; no appetite for food, or for that which is wholesome and proper.—When there is a general weakness and decay; the body being increasingly emaciated, and accompanied with positive pain and anguish. In like manner, the soul, when it is sick, has no relish for the enjoyments of religion; no ability for the duties of religion; no appetite for spiritual food; a general weakness of its powers, and a decay in its graces;—it is, as it were, emaciated, having lost its former brightness and beauty, the divine image being gone;—it has real pain and distress of mind, from the consciousness of guilt and sin, and fear of the consequences. — —

We may specify certain defects and disorders of the body, which are emblematical of those of the soul. Defects in the senses and members, as blindness, deafness, dumbness, lameness, &c. are emblems of the state of a mind that is ignorant of God's will, insensible to the calls of his providence and grace, unable to articulate his praise, and indisposed to walk in the way of his commandments. Various disorders, as a

fever, a phrensy, a dropsy, a consumption, &c. represent the state of a soul under the influence of voluptuous desires, ungoverned passion, inordinate love of money, or of the world. languishing from the decay of its spiritual strength. — —

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE RECOVERY OF SPIRITUAL HEALTH, WHETHER IT IS OF IMPORTANCE TO ATTAIN IT, AND WHAT PROVISION GOD HAS MADE FOR THAT PURPOSE.

The recovery of spiritual health implies,—That our understanding be enlightened in the knowledge of ourselves, of God, of Christ, the way of salvation, and Divine things.—That our conscience be awakened, informed, and “sprinkled,” from evil; or that our persons be justified.—That our nature be changed, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, producing the subjection of our will to that of God, the spiritualization of our affections, the due regulation of our passions and tempers, and the imprinting the truths, duties, and precepts of religion on our memories and hearts.—That our souls be refreshed and comforted by the Word and grace of Christ.

It is of importance, however, that our spiritual health should be restored? Yes Because spiritual health is of much greater consequence than bodily health. The glory of God is herein concerned, whose image, lost by the fall, is thus regained, and his will done; so that he is worshipped and served acceptably. The good of our fellow-creatures is concerned, and that both temporally and spiritually; for only thus can we be qualified to fulfil every relation as we ought to do, and be useful to

mankind. Our own peace, comfort and felicity, here and hereafter, are concerned; for we can neither be truly happy in this world, nor be admitted unto heaven, while under these spiritual disorders.

But has God made provision for the recovery of it? Is there balm in Gilead? and a physician there? Yes; Gilead cannot be without balm, or without a physician who can teach us how to apply it. Thus, the Church cannot be without the word and ordinances of God to enlighten, awaken, guide, enrich, and raise us to things above; nor the blood of Christ to atone and expiate guilt; nor the mercy and grace of God to render all effectual, and to communicate pardon and acceptance, and the invigorating and renewing influences of his Spirit to our souls.—Neither can the Church want the great Physician to direct, undertake, and effect our cure; a skilful, honest, compassionate, tender, assiduous Physician; who will administer perhaps the bitter medicine of affliction, or order a painful operation. —

III. WHY THEN IS IT NOT RECOVERED?

Men are not sensible they are disordered, or subject to any spiritual defects or maladies, like the Pharisees of old, who asked, “Are we blind also?”—Or they do not see of what importance it is they should be healed.—Or, they are in love with their distempers.—Or, they have not faith or confidence in the balm and Physician for healing.—Or, they do not apply to him, and make use of his remedies; they do not consider and receive in faith, love, and an obedient mind, the truths of his word, the doctrines, precepts, threatenings, promises, and attend, in a suitable, devotional spirit, his ordi-

nances; do not apply by faith to, and confide in the atoning blood, and embrace the pardoning mercy of God through it; they do not receive by faith the influences of his Spirit; do not use the means of prayer, in order thereto; they nauseate, and do not consent to take and digest the bitter medicines of affliction; do not submit to such operations as he orders to be performed, as the cutting off the right hand, the plucking out the right eye.—Or, they do not observe and follow his advice with respect to watchfulness, self-denial, taking up the cross.—Or, they drink the sweet poison of sin secretly, and practise what supersedes their cure.—Or, they do not attend to their diet, but feed on unwholesome food. Or, they do not breathe a pure, but an infected air, associating with the sick.—Or they do not take exercise.

APPLICATION.

Have not you been out of health?—Are you recovered? If not, why? Is not ample provision made to heal you?—Is it not of infinite importance you should be healed? and soon? Think how short and uncertain your life is.—Beware of supposing that death will heal you, or that hell is an infirmary. — — .

XLVIII.

THE YOKE OF RELIGION CONSIDERED.

LAMENTATIONS III. 27.

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

THIS Book, termed “The Lamentations of Jeremiah,” is an Elegy, or an Elegiac Poem, composed by him, but on what occasion, has been questioned. Because we are informed in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, that “Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel; and behold they are written in the Lamentations,”—some have concluded that this book was written on occasion of the death of Josiah. But the contents, I think, render it much more probable, that it was composed on account of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army, and the slaughter or dispersion of the inhabitants, through the sword, famine, and captivity; and the desolation of the country, and dissolution of their state both civil and ecclesiastical.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah are contained, both the predictions of these calamities and the history of them, to show how punctually those predictions were accomplished for the confirmation of our faith. In the Lamentations we have the expressions of his sorrow on account of them, to show that he was very sincere in the protestations he had often made, that he did not desire the woeful day, but on the contrary, that the

prospect of it filled him with the bitterest distress. When he saw these calamities at a distance he wished his "head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night," and when they actually came, he discovered that he had not dissembled in that wish, and that he was not disaffected to his country, as his enemies had represented, but a true patriot. Although his countrymen had been very unkind to him, and although their ruin was both a proof that he was a true Prophet, and a punishment of them for persecuting him as a false one, yet he sorrowfully lamented their condition, and thereby showed he was of a better temper than Jonah with respect to Nineveh.

As to the use of this mournful poem, it was doubtless intended to furnish the remaining Jews during their captivity, with suitable language in which to express their sorrow, to preserve in their minds, and impress the minds of their children, with a lively remembrance of Zion; to turn their tears into a right channel, by teaching them to mourn for sin, and mourn to God, and still further to lead them to entertain a hope, that God would yet turn and have mercy upon them.

That the poem might be more easily committed to memory, and thereby better answer these ends, each of the chapters, excepting the fifth, are alphabetical, every verse in each beginning in order, with the several letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This chapter, on which the Prophet seems to have bestowed peculiar pains, is a triple acrostic, the three first beginning with Aleph, the three next with Beth, and so on. Indeed, it contains sentiments of great importance, of

which, the one I have read as the subject of our present discourse, is not the least remarkable.

To impress the truth comprised in our text upon your minds, I propose to consider,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEARING THE YOKE HERE SPOKEN OF.

Although by “the yoke,” Jeremiah might principally mean the burden of those sufferings, so galling to the necks of the stubborn and rebellious Jews, which God had brought them under to restrain their wanderings, to subject them to himself, and to compel them to obey his laws; yet we may, with propriety enough, take the expression in a more general sense, as we find it used in other parts of the Scripture, and especially in Matt. xi. 29, where our Lord commands us to “take his yoke upon us.” It may be considered as meaning the law of God, or of Christ, or, in a word, religion.

This is termed a “yoke,”

On account of the restraint it lays us under. We naturally run wild, like a wild ass’s colt upon the mountains; with respect to our understanding, in speculation and error; our will, in stubbornness, disobedience, and rebellion; our affections, in irregular and inordinate love, desire, hope, joy, &c. True religion, when put on in reality, and, as it were, buckled close upon us by faith, restrains our disposition to wander from God. It restrains our members, which are now no longer at liberty to be employed “as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin;” our senses, which are no longer allowed to be inlets to sin; our appetites also and passions; our will and affections; our

understanding and judgment; our actions and our words; our tempers; and even our thoughts are laid under restraint, regulated, and brought into captivity to Christ. — — —

On account of the subjection to which it obliges us. The subjects of any power are said to be under "the yoke." (1 Kings xii. 10.)—Naturally we wear Satan's yoke, and are in subjection to him; (Eph. ii. 2;) to the world; (Gal. i. 4;) to the flesh; (Rom. vii. 5, 23;) to sin; (John viii. 34;) to death, and the fear of it. (Heb. ii. 15.)—True religion delivers us from these other lords, and brings us into subjection to Christ, whose loyal subjects we become, and he reigns in us by his grace, and over us by his laws. The nature of his kingdom is declared, Rom. xiv. 17. — — —

On account of the service in which it engages us. Servants are said to be "under the yoke." (1 Tim. vi. 1.)—Naturally, like unyoked bullocks, we live as if we were made to be idle, or to feed ourselves "fat for the day of slaughter." We "cumber the ground;" we are of no use in our generation; or, rather, we are yoked by Satan, and work for him. "His servants ye are to whom ye obey." (Rom. vi. 16.)—Religion frees us, as from subjection to other lords, so from the service of other masters; delivering us from Satan's yoke and service, it makes us the servants of Christ. (Luke i. 74, 75; Rom. vi. 17—22.) By repentance and faith in Christ we are delivered from Satan's yoke, are freed from the guilt and power of sin, and engaged in Christ's service.—We are yoked, not to lie down and sleep, or stand still, but to work, not only in the use of every means of grace, *for our own salvation*, especially prayer, watchfulness, self-denial, faith, obedience to

all known duty, and a “patient continuance in well-doing;” but *for the glory of God*, in endeavouring to make him known and feared by all men; and *for the good of our neighbour*, in all works of justice, mercy, charity. — —

On account of the associates with which it connects us. A bullock is not yoked that it may draw alone. We are united to the people of God, and, in conjunction with them, should serve the Lord in the fore-mentioned particulars.

On account of the patience and submission to which it obliges us, under our various chastisements. “Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.” (Jer. xxxi. 18.) Oxen, when brought under the yoke, are untoward, or refractory, or lazy, and, therefore, have need of the goad. We have need of it also for similar reasons; “the words of the wise are as goads;” and so are the various trials and troubles which we meet with. These, with all the sufferings they occasion us, also meant by the yoke here, tend to bring and keep us under the yoke of religion in all the senses above mentioned. — — —

II. HOW IT APPEARS THAT IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR THE YOKE, AND THAT EVEN IN HIS YOUTH.

Both the *honestum* and the *utile* are here intended by the word “good.”

It is *reasonable*. It becomes us, and is our duty, that we should come under the restraint before described; that we should be in subjection to, and the servants of Christ; that we should be united with God’s church; and be patient and submissive under his chastisement.

It is *honourable*.—What? to wear a yoke? to be in subjection, and to serve? Is not this disgraceful? And is not religion attended with reproach? In some sense, and from some persons it undoubtedly is. (Matt. v. 10—12; 1 Pet. iii. 14; iv. 4, 14; 2 Tim. iii. 12.) But these reproaches and sufferings are honourable, as being for the sake of truth and righteousness, of God and Christ. A yoke of some kind we must wear, and a yoke we do wear; and is it not more honourable to wear that of Christ, than that of Belial? [Let the two be compared together; their work also, and their wages. — — —] Is it not an honourable thing to be a subject of a very great, powerful, and gracious King? a servant of a rich, noble, and benevolent master? a friend, a brother, nay, and the spouse of the Prince of the kings of the earth? — — — To be associated with the wisest and best of men, the saints and servants of God; with patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all the redeemed? To be attended by angels day by day, and constituted heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ? — — —

It is *advantageous*.—As to this life; “Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is.” Does the husbandman feed his bullocks, and shall not God provide for those that draw in his yoke? “Thou shalt not muzzle,” said he, “the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” They shall have all things needful; (Matt. vi. 32, 33);—all things useful; (Psalm lxxxiv. 11);—evils turned into good. (Rom. viii. 28.)—As to the life to come, they enjoy the favour of an infinite and eternal Being; they are adopted into his family; restored to his image; hold communion and fellowship with him; have peace of mind; a lively hope of eternal life; and an earnest

thereof in their hearts, “until the redemption of the purchased possession;” but they will reap still greater advantages after death, in the intermediate state, at the day of resurrection and final judgment, and for ever. — — And even the yoke of suffering is useful, in many ways. — — —

It is *easy* and *pleasant*. What; to bear a yoke? Yes; a yoke lined with love.—“My yoke is easy;” *χρηστος*, *gracious*. “His commandments are not grievous;” to a loving heart, to a new nature. They are reasonable in themselves, and profitable to us, and therefore pleasant. Especially, when we recollect the powerful assistances afforded in keeping them; the suitable encouragements given from the promises; the strong consolations found in the way of duty. — — “My burden is light.” Even the yoke or burden of suffering is light. In itself indeed it is not joyous but grievous; but still as it is Christ’s burden, it is *light*, (2 Cor. iv. 17,) through God’s gracious presence, while we are enduring it; (Isai. xlii. 2;) Christ’s sympathy; (Isai. lxiii. 9; Dan. iii. 25;) the comforts of the Spirit. (2 Cor. i. 5.)

It is especially reasonable, honourable, advantageous, and pleasant to take upon us, and bear this yoke in our “youth.”

* * * * *

But we must consider,

III. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO DO SO.

Come out from among the carnal and wicked, and be separate. For, “a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

Associate with the people of God. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." (Prov. xiii. 20.)

Use much retirement, and read, and meditate on the Scriptures. (2 Tim iii. 15.)

Pray. The wisdom and strength of man is utterly insufficient; but "they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. (Isai. xl. 31.)

Be always watchful and circumspect. (Eph. v. 15.)

Deny yourself, and take up your cross daily. (Matt. xvi. 24.)

XLIX.

GOD'S MINISTERS THE WATCHMEN OF ISRAEL.

EZEKIEL XXXIII. 7—9.

O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

How extremely proper and highly instructive are all the names that are given to the true Messengers of God in the Holy Scriptures, and how extremely de-

scriptive of their character and office! Are they termed *Men of God*, as the prophets of old were, and as St. Paul entitles Timothy? It is to signify that they are devoted to him, employed for him, and imitators of him. Are they called *Seers*? It is because of the deep insight which they have into divine things in general, and into the spiritual and eternal world in particular. Are they styled *Prophets*? It is because it belongs to them, if not to foretell future events, yet to interpret the ancient prophecies, and declare the word of God, which predicts the eternal state of the righteous and the wicked. In this manner we may assign the reason of other names given to them in Scripture, as *Apostles, Evangelists, Teachers, Guides, Rulers, Elders, Bishops, Pastors* or *Shepherds, Physicians*.—See 1 Kings i. 9, &c. Acts xx. 28; Eph. iii. 5; iv. 11, 12; 1 Tim. vi. 11; Heb. xiii. 7, 17; 1 Pet. v. 1, 2, 4.

Here they are represented as *Watchmen*. Like watchmen, placed on towers, to discern and give notice of danger, the ancient prophets, by their prophetic spirit, were enabled to foresee the evils coming upon the ungodly, and were bound to give timely notice, that they might avoid them by true repentance and reformation. See ver. 1—6, and compare chap. iii. 17, and Jer. vi. 17. But this representation is by no means peculiar to Ezekiel, and the other prophets. The Ministers of the Gospel are also represented in this light. (Isai. lii. 8; lvi. 10; lxii. 6; see also Acts xx. 31; Heb. xiii. 17.)

Consider we,

I. THE REASON AND PROPRIETY OF THIS REPRESENTATION.

“Watchmen,” of old, were placed on elevated situations, on natural hills, on towers built by art, or on the walls of well-defended cities that, having an extensive prospect, they might discern what was taking place, and give information of the designs of the enemy; whence danger was to be apprehended, and how it might be prevented. They were also to foresee, and give notice of approaching deliverance and blessings, and to congratulate the people thereupon. And sometimes watchmen were appointed, as they still are, to patrol the streets of towns and cities, to discover or prevent disorders, as well as to give any intelligence, advice, direction, or warning, that might be needful or useful. And matters of this kind, it is to be observed, were their sole business.

Just so, the Ministers of the Gospel are placed (may I not say?) on a high and elevated station, through their appointment to their office; their abilities natural and acquired; (and most desirable it is they should possess them;) their knowledge of men and things, even of things human, but especially divine, obtained from the Word and Spirit of God. And here let me notice the absurdity of making a man a watchman, who stands on the same level with others, and has not a more extensive prospect than they; or is blind and cannot see, or dumb and cannot speak, or cannot speak intelligibly; or, of appointing a man to be a Minister, or teacher of others, who is not more illuminated, and superior in knowledge and grace, than those he is to instruct and watch over; or who has not utterance

wherewith to declare to others, as he ought, "the whole counsel of God."

To illustrate this point, the christian church may be considered as a large and extensive country, bordering upon the world, a country yet more large and extensive. The spiritual watchman is to view what passes in both, and to give his own countrymen, the true Israelites, information and warning. (Isai. xxi. 5—8; Hab. ii. 1;) Or, the church of Christ is a city, (Psal. lxxxvii. 1; Isai. lx. lxii; Heb. xii. 22; Phil. iii. 20, Gr.,) under one chief magistrate, Christ; who has appointed the laws, customs, and language thereof. This city should be at unity with itself within, and surrounded, as by walls and bulwarks, with salvation by the Lord, and by the faith, prayers, and watchfulness of the citizens. And on these walls, elevated by their knowledge, God having shined into their hearts, (2 Cor. iv. 6,) and by their divine appointment, and secured by the divine protection, (Rev. ii. 1,) the Ministers of the Gospel are placed as "watchmen."

This country of Christianity is liable to be invaded from without, and this city of the church of God to be attacked by the world and its prince. It may be invaded or attacked in its doctrines, by error; in its duties, by sin; in its privileges, by unbelief, despondency, formality, lukewarmness, and sloth.

The watchman gives notice and warning. From that eminence where the Lord has placed him, he observes,—where the defence is weak, and an assault or invasion may be made with probable success, and advises, or directs how that defence may be strengthened;—where the enemy are preparing to attack, or are actually so engaged, and calls to arms to meet the

danger and oppose them;—or, where they have actually made a breach in the doctrines or discipline of the church in general, or in the faith or practice of individuals, and by the sound of the Gospel-trumpet, he collects the citizens together, yet, if possible, to withstand and repel the foe.

This country or city is liable also to commotions and disorders from within.—As to individuals, from the flesh and its lusts. They may become luxurious, wanton, covetous, ambitious, proud, self willed, discontented, impatient, &c.—Or, as to the whole community, by surmises, jealousies, envyings, enmities, evil-speakings, which things would destroy the peace and unity of its members, and produce strife, contention, parties, divisions.—Its doctrines may be abandoned. its privileges rejected, its laws broken, its customs omitted, its form and established order changed. The “watchman” must warn and reprove the citizens, and lay their conduct before their Prince.

We must observe further here. that in this, and such like passages, in which the Ministers of the Gospel are termed “watchmen,” there seems to be an allusion to shepherds watching over their flocks, as there is in Acts xx. 28—31; 1 Pet. v. 4; Heb. xiii. 17; in order,—To defend them from wolves and beasts of prey.—To preserve them from going astray, or to bring them back.—To observe their health, strength, and growth, and cure their weakness and disorders. (Ezek. xxxiv. 4, 5.)—to provide them with, or lead them to pasture and water, and rest in the fold.—To separate the goats from the sheep.—For purposes similar to these, Pastors of the Lord's flock are appointed.—But, we are anticipating what belongs to the next general head, *viz.*

II. WHAT IS ESPECIALLY THE OFFICE AND DUTY OF MINISTERS, UNDER THIS CHARACTER, AS HERE REPRESENTED.

“Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.”

In general, on whichever of these accounts they are represented as “watchmen;” it is necessary that they should be—awake and watchful—diligent, keeping a good look-out.—They must regard no toil, labour, or suffering.—They must be faithful to him, and to them that appointed them; to the Lord and the people. (Luke xii. 42.)—They must distrust themselves, and apply to and depend on the Lord for supernatural aid. “He,” said Dr. Conder of London,* “that is more frequently in his pulpit before his people, than he is in his closet for his people, is but a sorry watchman.” We must know that the Chief Shepherd only can keep, feed, and rule the flock, and, in another view, that “unless the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” (Isai. lxii. 6, 7.)

But more particularly, their duty is here set forth, “Thou shalt hear the word at my mouth and warn them from me.” (Hab. ii. 1, 2.) We are not at liberty to imagine, or conjecture, or suppose this or that as necessary or expedient to the people over whom we watch, or retail our own opinions or fancies to them, but must come to our hearers with, *Thus saith the Lord*, and that with respect to doctrines to be believed, privileges to be enjoyed, precepts to be obeyed, promises to be expected, and threatenings to be revered. — — We must feed the flock of God, which he hath pur-

* From Sentences found among his MSS.

chased with his own blood, and over which he hath made us overseers; (Acts xx. 28;) but it must be in the Lord's pastures; and the "lambs" of the flock, and the "babes in Christ," with the "sincere milk of the word" (2 Cor. ii. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 2.) An example of the faithful execution of our duty is given in the text. "When I say unto the wicked," by my word or Spirit stirring up the Prophet to reprove him, he must perform his duty immediately, and faithfully, by saying to the wicked, to any such, whether rich or poor, mighty or mean, "Such courses as thou followest, shall certainly end in death, unless thy repentance prevent it."

But things are here expressed in the most general way. We must be more minute in our address to sinners; or our ministry will not have the desired effect. We must observe, all mankind are naturally wicked, all need repentance, all have encouragement to repent; (see ver. 11, 14;) that repentance implies not merely confession of sin, and a partial reformation, but a turning of the heart from sin to righteousness, followed by its proper fruits, and that without this, there is no salvation. (Luke xiii. 1.)—Nor is repentance sufficient without faith. A measure of faith indeed is requisite in order to any repentance, and, if genuine, it will be followed by that which justifies our persons, and sanctifies our hearts; implying a firm persuasion of the truth of the Gospel-revelation, particularly concerning Jesus Christ, a sincere application, and cordial submission to him in all the offices he fulfils for his people, and a thankful reception of all the benefits he has procured, and which God has promised in him. Even the penitent must die without faith. (John iii. 18; Mark xvi. 16.)—Nor is faith sufficient without love; an ardent, ad-

miring, grateful, complacent love to God, especially in consideration of his goodness to us, and an affectionate, disinterested, active love to all men, in imitation of God's love to them. St. Paul and St. John unite in testifying the necessity of this. (1 Cor. xiii. 1; 1 John iv. 7, 8.)—This must be followed by obedience. (John xiv. 15; 1 John ii. 3, 4, v. 3; Gal. v. 6; 1 Cor. vii. 19.)—These things are professed in vain without the new birth. (John i. 13; iii. 2; &c.;) the only evidence and certain effect of which is universal holiness in its inward dispositions and tempers, as well as outward acts (Heb. xii. 14.)—And we must persevere. See Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13, 18. This is a point needful to be insisted on by every watchman. (Ezek. iii. 20.) Christ insisted on it, (John xv. 4, 6,) and St. Paul. Rom. xi. 17—22; Heb. x. 38.) —

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF NEGLECTING OR FULFILLING THEIR DUTY.

“When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

“If thou do not warn the wicked;” sincerely, earnestly, frequently with repeated admonitions, as the word *הזהיר* signifies, giving them light by thy instructions, and making the matter clear and evident to them. Thus the Apostle warned all. (Acts xx 31.)—He “shall die in his iniquity.” But is not this a hard case? No. For, though not particularly warned by any messenger of God, he had the word of God in his hands, or, at least, he had the light of nature, and knew more or less of what was required of him.

“If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch;” he that is lead as well as he that leads.—Soul and body shall be lost for ever; he shall have the loss of the enjoyment of God, the society of angels and saints, and be exposed to infamy, poverty, misery, for ever.—These souls, and this punishment, are required at the watchman’s hands. How dreadful! The watchman, it appears, shall endure a misery, great in proportion to the number of souls he has neglected to warn.—Hence, both compassion for others, and fear for ourselves, should induce us to do our duty. Thus the Apostle: “Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. v. 10, 11.)

If the watchman fulfil his duty, he, at least, delivers his own soul. “If thou warn the wicked of his way, to turn from it, if he do not turn from his way he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.” (Ver. 9.)—The faithful watchman glorifies God. For it is much for the glory of all his attributes, that sinners should be warned, whether they take the warning or not; *e. g.*, his holiness, justice, mercy, love.—He receives a reward in proportion to his labours. (Isai. xlix. 4, 5; 1 Cor. iii. 8.)—The Lord always gives him some success. (Matt. vii. 16—20; John x. 2—5; 1 Tim. iv. 15, 16)—This will greatly heighten the joy and the glory of such in the day of the Lord. (1 Thess. ii. 19.)

APPLICATION.

You have been warned in all the particulars mentioned above. "I have not shunned," said the Apostle, St. Paul, "to declare unto you all the counsel of God;" and, I trust, they who are over you in the Lord and admonish you, may say the same. — —

Have you taken warning? Have you, ye wicked? Ye "fornicators, ye adulterers, ye effeminate, ye thieves, ye covetous, ye drunkards, ye revilers, ye extortioners?" (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.)—You, ye unbelievers?—Ye formalists?—Ye lukewarm professors?—Ye slothful?—Ye unregenerate?—Ye unholy?—Ye backsliders?

If you have not taken warning, what is the reason?—Is it that God hath passed* you over, and not given his Son to die for you? nor provided his grace to renew you? but left you to perish in your sins? By no means. Christ "tasted death for every man," died for all that were "dead." (2 Cor. v. 14.) See ver. 11.—

Is it that we have deceived and falsely represented the case: surely it is not. We have preached salvation free for you all, as well as full, and have set before you an open door; we have testified the extent and sufficiency of the death of Christ to remove your guilt, and the efficacy and universality of grace to purge away your defilement, and enable you to live henceforward to the glory of God.

We take you to witness that we are clear from the blood of you all. We "call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that we have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your seed may live." (Deut. xxx. 19.)

L.

THE MAJESTY AND GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

DANIEL IV. 34, 35.

I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

THIS solemn acknowledgment was made by Nebuchadnezzar, at the expiration of the period, during which, according to his dream, and the interpretation given of it, by Daniel, "he was driven from men, and his dwelling was with the beasts of the field." He had received a former dream or vision, which informed him of the great empires which should arise in the earth, as recorded in the second chapter. Of that preceding dream, which Daniel also had interpreted in the clearest and most instructive manner; we may observe, that as a seed, or bud, includes in it the fruit which shall spring from it, so that dream comprehended all the great events, and the prophecies concerning those empires which were to be gradually opened and disclosed in after ages, till they were fully evolved

and displayed in the Revelation by St John. It appears, indeed, to have comprised and predicted the events which have since taken place on the continent of Europe, respecting the overthrow of the powers that have supported Antichrist, and the grand apostacy from the faith, foretold by St. Paul in the first Epistle to Timothy. That former dream, however, had not the desired effect on Nebuchadnezzar. He afterwards "set up an image of gold." (Ch iii.) Therefore, in this, God warned him of an awful calamity to come on himself. Of this, Daniel, in his interpretation, clearly, and fully acquainted him, and also gave him important advice; to "break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." (Ver. 27.) It seems the advice was not taken, for (ver. 28) "all this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar."

God, however, in the midst of his deserved judgments remembered mercy; he removed the severe affliction, wherewith he had visited this heathen king. He restored to him the use of his reason, and reinstated him in his kingdom; and we may infer from the words before us, that he even converted his soul. "And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, &c."—A most noble and important confession this indeed, as proceeding from one who had been a worshipper of images, of "brass, iron, wood, and stone," "which see not, nor hear, nor know."

We have in these words,

I. THE MAJESTY OF THE ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD.

He is here styled "Most High," is said to "live for ever," and "all the inhabitants of the earth," are declared to be "reputed as nothing" before him.

He is the **MOST HIGH**; that is, he is exalted; not only in authority and power, of which I shall speak afterwards, but in the perfections of his nature, above every other being in the universe. I need not say, no man, but no angel, no archangel, no being whatever, can vie with him in any perfection. (Isai. xl. 25.) And yet, the angels of God "excel in strength," as David observes, and, doubtless, in wisdom, truth, holiness, mercy, and every other endowment. But what are these, and the like excellencies, in them, to similar attributes in him? Only what a shadow is to the substance which causes it; or a picture, to the thing it represents. For—These qualities in them are but obscure shadows, or a faint sketch of his perfections. In him they are absolute.—In them they are a mere stream, derived, and that from him. In him they exist as in their fountain, underived.—In them, they are dependent, and that on him; in him independent.—In them, they are mutable; in him immutable.—In them, they are finite; in him, infinite.—In them, they are temporal; in him, eternal.

For, to pass from the consideration of these perfections to his existence; He "**LIVETH FOR EVER.**" This implies,—His strict and proper Eternity. His existence is from everlasting, as well as to everlasting. He is without beginning, as well as without end. How mysterious! How unfathomable is the subject to us! How are we lost in the consideration of an Eter-

nal Being! a Being no older now, than a thousand, or six thousand years ago! He is, and always was, the "Ancient of Days."—His Self-existence. If he always was, he could not owe his existence to another. He has it in, and of, himself. Hence his name, I AM, or, I HAVE BEEN, or I WILL BE. "Thou whose name is JEHOVAH, art the Most High over all the earth." (Psal. lxxxiii. 18.) "He is, and was, and is to come. (Rev. i. 4.)—His Independence. He has an infinite sufficiency in himself for his own glory and happiness, and needs the aid of no creature in any respect. Should the whole universe be blotted out of existence, he would be no loser; and should an infinity of worlds start into being, he would be no gainer. He is *Eel shaddai*, God all-sufficient, for himself, as well as for his creatures.—His Immutability. Were he dependent on creatures, he might change with them. But as he is not, amidst all their incessant changes, he abides the same. He is "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning."—His Infinity. His Being, as well as his attributes, is boundless, filling immensity, as well as inhabiting Eternity.—Hence his Omnipresence. (Psal. cxxxix. 7.)—From which arises his Omniscience, and Omnipotence; for if his knowledge and wisdom be infinite, his power must be Almighty.

Therefore, "ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH," nay, and the highest creatures, "ARE REPUTED AS NOTHING."

They are as nothing *compared to Him*. Here let us stop, and consider.—Dead and unorganized matter is as nothing, compared with the vegetable creation, the herbs, plants, flowers, fruits.—One vegetable is as nothing compared to another; suppose the moss on a

building, to a cedar in Lebanon.—All vegetables are as nothing, compared with animals which are endowed with sensation, voluntary motion, perception, instinct, or discretion.—One animal, suppose a worm, or mite, is as nothing, compared to another, suppose to an eagle, a lion, an elephant, a whale.—Inferior animals are as nothing, compared with man, who is possessed of reason, speech, memory, capacity for religion.—One man far exceeds another; Sir Isaac Newton far exceeded an uninstructed peasant, or the Apostle Paul, a wicked profligate.—Men in their present state are as nothing, compared to angels, or to what they themselves shall be in a future state.—No doubt, one angel, archangel, or glorified saint, far exceeds another.—But all are as nothing to God.

For, what is a shadow to the substance?—What is a candle to the sun; a drop to the ocean; a grain of sand to the globe of earth? All beings, with all their excellencies, dwindle into nothing in his presence, “who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance.” (Isai. xl. 12.)

“The nameless He, whose nod is nature’s birth;
And nature’s shield, the shadow of his hand;
Her dissolution, his suspended smile!
The great First-Last! pavilion’d high he sits
In darkness, from excessive splendour born.
By gods unseen, unless through lustre lost.
His glory, to created glory, bright,
As that to central horrors; he looks down
On all that soars; and spans immensity.”

—What is a finite being, however exalted, to an Infinite? Especially, a being so limited as a man, a worm, a blast, a shade, a clod of clay, a speck of dust?—What is a temporal being to one Eternal? one, that has had a beginning, to one that has not had? a being of yesterday, to one who is from eternity? especially one so short-lived as man, whose days are a hand-breadth, and his life a vapour, to one that hath immortality?—What is a being incessantly changing, and never at one stay, or for two minutes in one state, to a Being immutable, and always the same?—What is a created and dependent being to one uncreated and independent? What is the work, to the workman? the creature, to the Creator? the clay, to the potter? Especially, what is a creature, like man, depending, not only on his Creator for life, motion, and being, but on a thousand of his creatures; indeed on almost every person and thing; on the air, the water, the earth, the sun, and moon, on the inferior animals, on plants and herbs? —

They are as nothing, *without Him*. They are as nothing to help. We may be in such a situation, as to our property, character, body, soul, family, that neither man, nor any creature, can help us. And our country also may be so situated, that none but God can deliver it. Those who should help may be far absent, or, if present, unwilling, or incapable of assisting us. — Therefore, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.” (Psalm cxlvi. 3.)—They are as nothing to hurt without him. Favoured, befriended, and surrounded by the omniscient. omnipotent, and omnipresent God, we need not fear the ignorance or weakness of man.—

They are nothing *in themselves*.—They are nothing in *duration*. “As for man his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. Psal. xxxix. 5; xc. 4; ciii. 15.) — They are nothing *absolutely*; nothing solid or substantial, a mere bubble, a vapour, a shadow. We cannot subsist a moment without support and influence from God, which, if he withdraw, we return to the nothing out of which we were taken. (Job iv. 19, 21; Ps. cxlvi. 4.)

We now come to consider,

II. HIS GOVERNMENT.

It is everlasting, universal, absolute, wise, just, and good.

It is *everlasting*. As he liveth for ever, so his dominion is, if not from eternity, (for a king supposes subjects,) yet to Eternity.—As he is Most High above every other being in the excellencies of his nature, so his authority and empire are *unlimited* over every other. Not only the inhabitants of earth, but the armies of heaven are under his government.—All worlds are subject to him; and it is not improbable that every fixed star is a sun with many worlds revolving round it. — How extensive is his dominion! All persons, men, both good and bad, angels, and devils, being employed by him, under his control, and accountable to him. The highest angel is not above his command, nor the meanest man, nor even insect, beneath his notice.—All things and events are subject to his will and control; battles by sea and land; empires lost and won; prosperity and adversity; sickness, health; life, death. Even what we call accidents are under his direction,

and cannot happen without his permission or appointment. For “a sparrow falleth not to the ground without the notice of our heavenly Father.”

His sovereignty is *absolute* and unconfined, and his power irresistible. His will is his law. None can resist his purpose, change his counsel, arraign his proceedings, or inquire into the meaning of them, or demand the reason for them. (Job ix. 12; Isai. xlv. 9; Rom. xi. 33—36.) — —

His government is *wise, just, and good*, yea, infinitely so. All these attributes are not only to be discerned in his law, which is “holy, just, and good,” calculated to promote happiness as well as virtue and holiness; but are also to be clearly traced in the dispensations of his providence. (Ver. 37.) Many difficulties indeed present themselves from the very imperfect view which we can take, at present, of the administration of his government; (Psal. lxxvii. 19; xcvi. 2;) but at the day of judgment, every intricacy will be unravelled, and the most minute circumstance will appear to have been ordered with perfect wisdom and equity, when the universal church shall unite in that song, “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.” (Rev. xv. 3.)

III. THE USE WE SHOULD MAKE OF THIS DOCTRINE.

We should make the same use of it which Nebuchadnezzar did. We should “bless the Most High, and praise, and honour him that liveth for ever,” &c. To be more particular,—We should learn to admire and adore his infinite condescension and love, in so peculiarly noticing and regarding us. (Psal. viii. 4; Job. vii.

17, 18)—In preserving us, and providing for us.—In pitying us in our lost estate.—In redeeming us.—In adopting us for his children.—In engaging to bring us to his heavenly kingdom. — —

We should learn the reasonableness of self-humiliation under his mighty hand, the necessity of being entirely subject to him, and the folly and madness of attempting to resist him, either as individuals, as families, or as a nation.

We should observe the ground, afforded us for trusting in him at all times, and in all situations and circumstances; and that for personal blessings, the necessities and conveniencies of life, for grace to help in time of need, for perfect sanctification, as a meetness for heaven, and the future fruition of it; for family blessings, and for national. “His arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” — —

We should learn the duty of being continually resigned to his will, as he does all things well, and *for us*, even when we think all is *against us*. (Gen. xlii. 36.) —

We should learn, that we should praise, and thank him for all things, seeing that he will assuredly make all work for our good. — —

We see how reasonable it is that we should give this infinitely perfect and amiable, as well as most kind and gracious Being, our hearts and lives, our souls and bodies — —

We learn the way in which we may be enabled to do all this.—Put off the character of the brute, and put on that of the man; no longer looking downwards, but looking up, as our very frame reminds us that we should. Recover the right and sound use and exercise

of your understanding. (See the text, and compare Luke xv. 17.) Dedicate all your faculties, your time and strength, to those pursuits that accord with true wisdom and solid happiness. Meditate and lay to heart, what you know of the Majesty and Government of this wonderful Being, make him your refuge and dwelling-place. (Deut. xxxiii. 27; Psal. xc. 1.) Pray, and watch always.

LI.

THE GLORIOUS REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

DANIEL XII. 3.

They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

IN the writings of the Prophets, we generally find, that after predictions of calamitous events, consolatory promises are added, for the support of the true people of God under them. Thus Daniel, having been directed to foretell the sufferings which the Jews were called to endure under the reign of the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, which appear also to be figurative of the troubles which the rise of Antichrist would occasion to the Christian Church, is here instructed by the Angel that talked with him, to deliver such promises as were adapted to sustain the faith, and console the

minds of the children of God, both during the former affliction, and in the times prefigured by it. The name applied to the person spoken of in the first verse of this chapter, ("Michael," signifying, *who is like God*,) as about to interpose in a signal manner for the deliverance of the Church, and the title given to him, "the great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people," cannot, in their proper sense, be applied to a created angel, but seem to point out Christ, who, as "the Angel of the Covenant," without doubt pleaded on behalf of the natural seed of Abraham, to obtain their deliverance from the persecuting Antiochus by means of the family of Judas Maccabeus, and who, not very long after the death of that tyrant,* was about to work a far greater deliverance for "the children of his people," by his incarnation, death, and resurrection, and his consequent "appearing in the presence of God for us." (Heb. ix. 24.) And whatever be the interpretation of the following words; whether we are to understand the "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation," of the calamities suffered by the Jews, before, and during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, and brought upon them for their rejection of the Messiah, from which, such as believed in him, and embraced his Gospel, were delivered, even "every one that" was "found written in the book," viz. "of the living," (Psal. lxxix. 8;) or, whether we understand it of the troubles to be endured by the Church, in times yet future, from the powers opposed to Christianity, and from which every upright member shall be delivered; it is agreed by almost all commentators, that

* About 160 years.

the words of the second and third verses relate to the general resurrection in the last day, and the eternal state; nor could any doctrine be more suitably referred to, for the purpose of supporting the pious and faithful Jews, who submitted to the most cruel tortures, under the persecution of Antiochus, "not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection," (Heb. xi. 35,) or to afford consolation to those who at any other period may be called to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, to whom our Lord said, "Great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. v. 12.) — —

From the words thus introduced, let us consider,

I. THE TWO DESCRIPTIONS OF PERSONS SPOKEN OF BY THE ANGEL TO DANIEL.

"They that be wise;" and "they that turn many to righteousness."

By the "WISE," we are not to understand those that are learned in languages, arts, or sciences. or those possessed of great knowledge of things natural, civil, or even religious; much less those that are subtle, or, as the expression is, worldly wise, and politic: but, simply, that are godly and righteous, or that possess genuine religion. The Holy Scripture pronounces those, and only those to be wise; (Psal. cxi. 10: Prov. xv. 33; and, especially, Job xxviii. 28.) As to those of a contrary stamp, it demands, "What wisdom is in them?" (Jer. viii. 9.)

True religion is wisdom, because it more effectually, than any thing else, distinguishes man from all the inferior creatures. They evidently possess a faculty of reasoning, though in a much lower degree, but are

utterly incapable of the knowledge and service of God. True religion also removes the sources whence arise most of the follies of mankind. — — It improves whatever is excellent in human attainments and actions. — It fills the mind with tranquility and peace; a kind of wisdom which few rich, great, or learned men attain. — — The servant of God is wise, because he is taught of God by his works, his providence, his word, and, especially, by his Spirit, even “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” and possesses the most important and necessary knowledge in the world. He knows the nature and attributes, the will and ways of the living and true God, whom to know is “life eternal;” (John xvii. 3;) he knows him as his Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, Redeemer, Saviour, Friend, and Father, and, therefore, fears, loves, serves and enjoys him. He knows Christ in his person and offices, his love and sufferings, his humiliation and exaltation, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col ii. 3.) He knows the Gospel, and the mysteries contained in it, especially that of redemption and salvation. He knows what it is the will of God he should believe, experience, enjoy and practise, in order to his happiness here, and hereafter. He is therefore “wise unto salvation.”—He endeavours to make a wise use of his time, and all his talents; employing them, not merely in a way in which he may possibly obtain a pardon upon repentance, for not using them better; but in a way in which he is assured he shall receive a reward. — — Hence, he is wise to provide for the future; for “the evil days” that are probably coming on him in this world; and for a future life after this. — —

But the Angel sets before Daniel another, and still more exalted character, *viz.* those who, not being content to gain wisdom only for themselves, endeavour to make others wise; yea, THAT TURN MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

As in the sentence immediately preceding the text, the Angel had been predicting the general resurrection of the last day when “many,” yea, all, “that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, and everlasting contempt;” he undoubtedly here speaks of the righteousness which shall entitle and fit those, that possess it, for that everlasting life; the righteousness through which, as St. Paul expresses it, “grace reigns unto everlasting life;” (Rom. v. 21;) or which has its origin in grace, and its end in glory. He, therefore, does not speak of any man’s “own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,” (Phil. iii. 9,) even that which is through him, whom Jeremiah had called, “the Lord our righteousness;” (Jer xxiii. 6;) including the justification of men’s persons, the renovation of their nature, and a practical obedience to God in heart and life; flowing therefrom.—*Justification*; “even as David had described the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputed righteousness without works;” (Rom. iv. 6;) attained by faith in the Messiah, and in the promises of God through him, as Abraham believed God, when he said, “Thy seed shall be as the stars;” (Gen. xv. 5;) and, “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen.

xii. 3.)*—*Renovation, or Regeneration.* Thus God had said by Ezekiel, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.” (ch. xxxvi. 25—27.) And by Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (ch. xxxi. 33.) This our Lord calls the being “converted;” (Matt. xviii. 3;) the being “born again;” (John iii. 7;) “born of the Spirit;” (John iii. 5;) and St. Paul, “the renewing of the Holy Ghost;” (Tit. iii. 5;) “putting off the old man, and being renewed in the Spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man;” (Eph. iv. 22—24;) or the being made “new creatures;” (Gal. vi. 15; 2 Cor. v. 17;) the consequence of which is—*Practical obedience*, (Eph. ii. 10,) insisted on continually, as the Angel well knew, by all the prophets.

Let it be well observed, then, the Angel does not speak of turning men from one opinion, or mode of worship, or sect and party, (many of which were then among the Jews, and would be among Christians,) to another. but to righteousness; true, genuine, scriptural righteousness. Let all Christian Ministers attend to this, and take care that the converts they make be of this description; converts to God. It is, however, necessary,

* Let the Preacher explain the nature and object of Abraham's faith, and show how it is to be imitated by us.

in order to this, that men be brought to understand, believe, and embrace “the truth as it is in Jesus.” For by the truth they are made free; (John viii. 31—36;) are justified; (John xv. 3;) are regenerated; (Jam. i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23;) are sanctified; (John xvii. 17;) are perfected, and “thoroughly furnished to every good work.” (2 Tim. iii. 17; Eph. iv. 11—15.) In other words, men must believe and lay to heart, and be properly influenced by the great doctrines of the Gospel, termed “the faith once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3;) “the mystery of faith in a pure conscience;” (1 Tim. iii. 9;) “the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” (Eph. ii. 19, 20.) These doctrines must be received, not in speculation merely, but in experience, and produce.—The possession of Christian graces; repentance unto life, living faith, lively hope, unfeigned love, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, &c.—The enjoyment of Christian privileges; a sense of the Divine favour, and of adoption, the Spirit of adoption, access to, and communion with God, an earnest of heaven in our hearts.—The performance of all Christian duties to God, our neighbours, and ourselves. Such, and only such, may look “for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Tit. ii. 11—13.)

No wonder that the Angel should single out the character of those who “turn many to righteousness,” and lay such stress upon it. For by their zeal and labours, men escape the “shame and everlasting contempt” mentioned ver. 2, or the infamy and misery to which the unrighteous shall be condemned, at the day of judgment, (Matt. xxv. 46; Mark ix. 43—48; 2 Thess. i,

8, 9,) and obtain the glory, honour, and felicity promised to the righteous: *i. e.* They escape a misery unspeakable and eternal, and obtain a happiness that has neither measure nor end. Through their instrumentality also God, whose nature is love, is peculiarly glorified; and besides those whom they turn to righteousness, others are converted and edified; for they that are turned to God themselves, never fail more or less to turn others. Of what importance then is the conversion of one single soul! And no wonder; for every single soul is bought with the blood of the Son of God! (1 Pet. i. 18—20.)

From what has been said, it must be perceived that the Angel does not oppose the two characters here mentioned to each other. For all that are “wise” will, in a greater or less degree, endeavour to turn others to righteousness.—And that a man may be an instrument of such good, he must first be “wise,” or “righteous,” himself, and then God will work with him.—But a man may be wise or righteous, and not lay himself out as much as he might, for this purpose. Hence, by the latter characters named in the text are intended chiefly, those who give themselves up with all their might to this work, dedicating to it their time and talents, souls and bodies; and especially Ministers of God’s word.

I must now direct your attention briefly to,—

II. THE PROMISES MADE TO SUCH CHARACTERS.

“They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.”—That is of the unclouded sky; the clear solar light, diffused through the atmosphere, refracting and reflecting its beams; the most beautiful,

pleasant, and refreshing object the human eye can behold. The persons described, shone on earth, by their holy example and conversation, (Matt. v. 16,) giving clear, reviving, and exhilarating instruction; but the clouds of infirmity in themselves, and of prejudice, reproach, persecution from others often obscured their light, and prevented its designed and desired illuminating effect. But, hereafter, every obstruction shall be removed. In the intermediate state, and especially after the resurrection, they shall shine with perfect, and constant, and everlasting splendour, shall shine in their perfectly purified souls, and their glorified bodies, our blessed Lord says, “as the sun in the kingdom of their Father;” (Matt. xiii. 43;) to which promise he adds, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

But, to show how those of the second class shall be distinguished from the former, and from each other, another metaphor is used; “and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” They were as conspicuous and brilliant stars on earth in the right hand of Christ. For we read, (Rev. i. 20,) “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches,” giving light during the absence of the Sun of Righteousness, and guiding the churches on their voyage to the port of eternal bliss, and pointing out to them, and warning them against the sand-banks, shoals and rocks, on which they were in danger of striking. And when this duty is performed, they do not “fall from heaven,” like the star mentioned, Rev. ix. 1, into the bottomless pit; but from the firmament of the church on earth, or these lower heavens, they rise to the “heaven of heavens,” where is the throne of God and the Lamb, and shine with distinguished splendour in the kingdom of

their Father; being possessed of a glory proportioned to the number they turned to righteousness, or directed in the right way while they shine on earth; or, rather, according to the pains they took, the labours they sustained, and the sufferings they endured in order to this end. For “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.” (1 Cor. iii. 8: Rev. xxii. 12.) —

LII.

REPENTANCE, A RENDING OF THE HEART

JOEL II. 13.

Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

How various are the judgments of God, and how manifold the ways which he takes to chastise and punish mankind in this world, for their sins, that they may be brought to repentance, and escape the vengeance of eternal fire in the world to come! He not only makes use of the sword, of famine, of pestilence, of earthquakes, of inundations, of fires, of inclement seasons, of the curse of barrenness in the earth, and similar calamities, but even of the noisome beasts of the earth, of the voracious fowls of the heaven, and of the very insects! The calamity described in such awful language

in this chapter, was of this nature. It was neither more nor less than a plague of locusts, and of other insects. How great the power, and how terrible the wrath of that Being, who can bring such judgments upon a people, and punish them so dreadfully, by such an insignificant creature! [Read chap. i. 2—13, 15, &c.]

On a foresight of this dreadful calamity, desiring that, if possible, it might be prevented, in part, if not altogether, or at least that it might be speedily removed after it had actually begun, the Prophet calls for fasting, prayer, and humiliation, (ch. i. 14; ii. 15,) and especially for repentance and reformation.

The exhortation is peculiarly proper for us at this time, while smarting under the chastising hand of God, and threatened with still greater judgments on account of our sins as a nation.*

Consider,

I. THE EXHORTATION OR ADVICE GIVEN.

“Rend your heart, and not your garments.” A mean and coarse habit was anciently used as a token of grief. So also, “rending of the garments” was a sign of great sorrow and amazement. Thus Job rent his mantle, (Job i. 20,) and his friends, (ch. ii. 12;) so did Tamar, when ravished; (2 Sam. xiii. 19;) so did Hushai, when David fled before Absalom: he met him with his clothes rent, and ashes, or “earth, on his head” (2 Sam. xv. 32.) The High Priest was forbid to rend his garments. This custom, however, when a sense of the evil of sin and true sorrow for it were wanting, degenerated into a hypocritical form.

* This Sermon was preached on occasion of a National Fast.

Therefore the command is, “Rend not your garments, but rend your hearts.” *From* what must they be rent? Rend them *from* sin, known, wilful, outward, inward, sin of commission, and of omission, especially from your besetting sin.—From earth and earthly things; such as riches, honours, pleasures, and the love of them.—From all creatures, however valuable, needful, delightful; as much so as a right hand, a right eye. From ourselves; our own wisdom, our own will, our lusts, our righteousness, our strength.—From hypocrisy and formality.—From pride and self confidence.—From unbelief, improper diffidence and distrust.

But *how* must they be rent? Rend them by godly consideration, and self-examination—By conviction and humiliation.—By shame and sorrow.—By confession and abhorrence.

Rend your *hearts*.—Not your bodies; like Baal’s priests, the blind Papists, or some followers of Mahomet, who when they had seen his tomb are said to have put out their eyes.—But your *hearts*, the conscience must be pierced, the will conquered, the spirit humbled, the affections moved, and the old, hard heart made soft and broken.—The need of this, a little inquiry into the natural and actual condition of our hearts may suffice to show. — — A bone set wrong must be broken again. Clay must be bruised and tempered to make a vessel. The “broken heart” is God’s “sacrifice.” (Psal. ii. 17.)

“And turn to the Lord.”

Sin, the love of the world, of any creature, of ourselves, pride, hypocrisy, unbelief, are the way to turn and depart from God. (Heb. iii. 12.)—But we must turn to God, by contemplation or thought, desire or prayer, faith and confidence, expectation and delight,

gratitude and love.—Therefore it must be by the Holy Ghost, (Eph. ii. 18; Jude 20.) and through the Son. (John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 13; Heb. iv. 14—16; x. 19—22.)—We must turn to the Father as our God, not only as our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, Redeemer, Saviour, but as standing in nearer and more intimate relations; our Friend, Father, Husband.—This we cannot do of ourselves. “Turn us, and we shall be turned.” (Lam. v. 21.) “Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” (Psal. lxxx. 19.)

But, for *what* are we to turn?—For illumination, “Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” (Psal. iv. 6.)—For pardon.—For his favour.—For his image.—For communion and fellowship with him. — —

、 II. THE MOTIVES WHICH ENFORCE IT.

Evil is gone forth to chastise or punish sin. “The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land;” (Hos. iv. 1—3;) with individuals for their particular sins, or for the general impenitence, unbelief, hypocrisy, vice and profaneness. — —

If our heart be not torn, he will tear us in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver;” (Psal. l. 22;) he “will rend the caul of the heart, and will devour us like a lion.” (Hos. xiii. 6—8.) “Cut asunder” the unprofitable servant, “and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites,” (Matt. xxiv. 51;) where shall be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This cannot otherwise be avoided, than by condemning ourselves, by rending our own hearts, and “turning unto the Lord our God.” — —

God is good, not only to “repent of the evil,” and do it not, but to do good. He is,—“Gracious,” full of grace, ready to give grace in order to rend the heart, and to turn it to himself.—“Merciful,” to pardon and accept a penitent nation, or penitent sinners. —“Slow to anger;” witness our being spared so long as individuals, notwithstanding our great provocations; and as a nation, our being so long saved from our enemies.—“Of great kindness;” witness a dying Jesus, an entreating ministry, so many sweet promises, and alluring mercies.—He “repents him of the evil;” witness Nineveh spared, the barren fig tree; witness backsliding Israel. (Jer. iii. 2,) and Ephraim; (Hos. xi. 8;) witness that solemn declaration, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live;” (Ezek. xxxiii. 11; xviii. 32;) and the testimony of the Apostle Peter. (2 Pet. iii. 9.)

APPLICATION.

Ye unconverted and careless! “turn ye unto the Lord your God.” Ye are sick, and past feeling, sick unto death! Religion is a heart work. The heart must be rent. However painful this is to be experienced, it is not so terrible, as to be torn away from all good, from God and heaven! You will soon be rent from earth and all that is in it, from your property; your honours; your pleasure; your health; your relations and friends; your wife and children, and whatever else is dear to you. your soul will be rent from your body! — —

* If this plan be used as a National Fast Sermon, the preacher should here mention some particular instance of the divine forbearance towards the nation.

Ye that are convinced of your sins! God has begun to turn you; he will turn you more and more, and again and again; his power, his love, his mercy, his faithfulness, are engaged on your behalf. Plead his promises. Dwell on his titles as referred to in the text. —

Ye backsliders! See the vail of Christ's flesh, and of the temple, rent! to give you access to God, liberty to enter into the holiest! Will you rend and crucify him afresh by your unrepented wickedness, and faithless behaviour? — —

Ye godly! still maintain a broken and contrite heart, and mourn for yourselves, and for others. And that you may do so, meditate often on your own sins and follies; and on the sins and follies of mankind, set God, death, judgment, and eternity before you, and guard against levity and carelessness of mind. — — Grief and humiliation are not, indeed, pleasant to human nature, but they are consequences of sin, and of the fall, and are the appointed means of our recovery. They are medicinal; and if produced by grace, and followed by their right effects, they will certainly end in eternal joy and bliss — The more contrite and sorrowful "after a godly sort" we are, the more enjoyment we are likely to have of Christ, and the promises of the Gospel. He, who became "a man of sorrows," and was "bruised for our iniquities," will not suffer us to be more sorrowful than will be good for us. "He will appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Isai. lxi. 3.)

LIII.

LUKEWARMNESS IN RELIGION EXPOSED.

AMOS VI. 1.

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.

THESE words describe the state and misery of those Israelites, who were self-confident, self-indulgent, unconcerned, and at rest, though they were in the midst of many and crying sins, and on the brink of deep and various judgments. They may be very properly applied, to signify the state, and point out the danger and misery of those, amongst the professors of religion in all ages, and under every dispensation of Divine grace, who are careless and loitering in the ways of God, instead of “working out their salvation with fear and trembling.”

Consider,

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY BEING “AT EASE IN ZION.

The word “ease,” might be more properly termed “disease.”

No censure is here intended on the state of peace, rest, and spiritual happiness, which all the true servants of God have enjoyed in all ages; and to which the followers of Christ are especially entitled under the Gospel; (Isai. xxxii. 17, 18; Matt xi 28—30; Heb. iv. 3;) including peace with God, peace of conscience, tranquillity of mind, rest of soul. — —

But ignorance and insensibility as to the paramount importance of spiritual and eternal things are the root and source of the disorder here mentioned.—Hence arise lukewarmness and indifference with respect to those things.—Indolence and sloth in the pursuit of them; leading us either not to use the means, especially such as the giving up a besetting sin, the parting with every beloved lust; the reading, meditating, and examining ourselves by the word; secret prayer united with fasting, watchfulness, and self-denial; or to rest contented in these means without their end.—Procrastination, and putting off from day to day, what we know to be our present duty. — — —

The consequence of this may be, perhaps, that things go on smoothly, and we meet with no opposition;—from the Devil no injections;—from the world, that is, from the men of it, no persecution, and from the things of it, no disappointments, losses, or perplexities, but a succession of prosperity;—from the flesh no resistance, because we suffer ourselves to be carried quietly down the stream. — —

All these things conspire to make us self-confident and careless, or “at ease in Zion.” — —

Let us,

II. POINT OUT SEVERAL CLASSES OF PEOPLE TO WHOM THIS CHARACTER PROPERLY BELONGS.

All unawakened and unconvinced persons may thus be characterized, whether at rest in their possessions, like the rich man; (Luke xii. 16—20;) or infatuated by pleasure, like Lot’s relations; (Gen. xix. 14;) or amused with views of honour like the Jews with whom our

Lord conversed; (John v. 44;) or those who are “daubing themselves with the untempered mortar” of various external duties, and speaking false peace to their souls.

But it is not those that are “at ease” in Sodom or Babylon, but “in Zion,” that I must point out, *i. e.* those of this character among professors.—Those who are convinced of their sins. and yet are at rest and make themselves easy without coming to Christ for a pardon, and obtaining a new birth.—Those justified persons, who do not go on to holiness and perfect love, who are in the state of “young men.”—Those who profess to have attained so far, and are not on stretch in following after a full conformity to Christ, and “the resurrection of the dead.” (Eph. iv. 22; Phil. iii. 10, 13.)—And, finally, who are not diligent in doing good works. — —

III. SHOW THE CAUSES WHICH CONSPIRE TO MAKE AND KEEP THEM SO.

As to the people of the world, the causes are—Infidelity. (Heb. iii. 19; iv. 2.)—Inconsideration, not laying to heart the vast importance of christian attainments.—Comparing themselves with others, instead of comparing themselves with the word of God.—Mistaken views of religion; as the thinking it an easy thing to be religious, whereas, it is not rest but *labour*, not standing idle, but a *race*, not peace with ourselves, and enjoying the spoils of victory, but *wrestling* and *warfare*; and the taking it for granted that the generality will be saved, which is not the case; for the gate is *strait*, and the way *narrow*, “that leadeth unto life.”

As to the Church, the causes are, mistaken views in the particulars above mentioned; and, more particularly,—as to the convinced, their supposing that “if God has begun a good work, he will carry it on without their own efforts;”—as to the justified, that, being once in grace, they shall always be in grace;—as to the sanctified, that sin is already rooted out, and destroyed, and now there is no flesh to oppose or watch against. — — —

IV. THEIR DANGER AND MISERY.

“*Woe* to them that are at ease.”

They displease God, and are under his wrath (Rev. iii. 16.)—

They are a hinderance in the way of all who witness their indifference and sloth.—

They lose their labour. “No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke ix. 62.) And continuing in this remiss and careless way, he is likely to be hardened “through the deceitfulness of sin,” and to fall into aggravated condemnation, according to the knowledge he had obtained of the will of God. (Luke xii. 48.)

LIV.

THE NATURE, SOURCE, AND MEANS OF
SPIRITUAL PEACE. †

HAGGAI II. 9.*

In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.

IF this might be said of the temple at Jerusalem, where the sacrifices of bulls and goats were offered which could not take away sin, the prayers of Old Testament saints were put up, and the Law of Moses was read and expounded; the words may with, at least, equal, if not greater propriety be used of every place under the New Testament dispensation,—a dispensation much more perfect,—where the sacrifice of Christ, which does put away sin, and procure peace with God, is offered, the Gospel of peace is proclaimed, the prayers of the New Testament saints are put up and presented through our great High Priest, and the Spirit of peace and love is bestowed. — —

Inquire we,

I. INTO THE NATURE OF THE PEACE HERE SPOKEN OF.

To understand this promise, we must observe, that man is by nature at enmity with God.—All are sinners. (Rom. iii. 23.)—All are under wrath. (Rom. i. 18; Eph. ii. 1—3.)—There is an enmity on the part of man

* This was the subject of a Sermon on the opening of a Chapel for the worship of God.

towards God. (Rom. viii. 5—7; Col. i. 21.)—Hence, guilt is charged, and condemnation and wrath denounced upon him by God.

The peace here intended includes,

Peace with God; i. e. forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation with him. (Rom. v. 1.)—When this is witnessed to the soul, by the Spirit of God, the enmity is removed, or the will is subdued, and the affections are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; whence spring “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”—

Peace of conscience; arising from the pardon of past sin, and power over sin. (Rom. viii. 1—3, 6, 12—15.) —

A *peaceful, serene, and tranquil* state of mind; the will and affections being subdued, and all the tempers changed, and sanctified. (Col. iii. 12—15; Phil. iv. 7.) —

Peace with all men; injustice, oppression, guile, fraud, covetousness, pride, anger, and other causes of discord and strife, being removed. —

How great the excellency of this peace, and the blessedness of those that possess it! —

II. WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS PEACE, AND THE WAY IN WHICH HE WILL GIVE IT.

It is not *ourselves*.—Our own works cannot purchase it, nor reconcile God to us. They are all of them imperfect, stained with sin, and instead of procuring favour, deserve Divine wrath.—Our own strength and endeavours, and our abstinence and religious duties, of whatever kind, cannot remove the enmity on our

part, and reconcile us to God.—Nothing that we have done or can do, can pacify or give peace to an awakened conscience; can produce a really peaceful state of mind; or destroy those evil dispositions, which are the grand hinderances of peace among men.

It is not *others*; not their absolutions, prayers, or advices.— —

It is the *gift of God*. He is its author.—It comes from him as a free gift. — — — His mercy passes by our past sins, and pardons them; thus wrath on his part is removed. His Spirit removes our enmity to him, witnesses the pardon of sin, and gives us power over it. Hence we have peace with God, peace of conscience, tranquillity of mind, and peace with all men.—But it comes through Christ, the blood of his cross, and the pacification made thereby (Tit. iii. 4—6; Col. i. 20; Eph. ii. 13, 14.) — — How inestimable the ransom by which we obtain this blessing! — —

III. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF IT; OR, THE PERSONS TO WHOM HE WILL GIVE IT.

It is purchased by Christ for all, and offered to all. (2 Cor. v. 18, 19; Isai. lvii. 19.)

But it cannot be possessed by the wicked. (Isai. lvii. 20.) “God is angry with the wicked every day.” (Psal. vii. 11.) Hence, the necessity of repentance.*

It cannot be the portion of the unbeliever. (John iii. 18, 36.) Hence the necessity of faith.†

* Describe the nature and fruits of repentance.

† Describe the nature of faith, and the change consequent upon it.

Repentance and faith are both the gifts of God, and must be sought in the use of prescribed means, as hearing the word and prayer. We hence obtain light concerning the method of justification and peace; the sufficiency and grace of Christ are revealed by the Spirit, and our hearts are drawn to him.

IV. THE PLACE WHERE HE WILL GIVE IT, AND THE TIME WHEN.

All times and places may be considered as holy under the Gospel. (John iv. 21.)

Nevertheless when and where the Gospel is preached, and prayer offered to God. repentance and faith are usually given, and Christ in his Word and Spirit is peculiarly present. (Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20.)

LV.

THE PERSON, COMING, WORK, AND OFFICES
OF THE MESSIAH.

ZECHARIAH VI. 12, 13.

Behold the man whose name is, The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a Priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

ALTHOUGH some parts of this prophecy of Zechariah are obscure, and of difficult interpretation, which is the case also with most of the other minor Prophets; yet many parts thereof are perfectly luminous, and full of instruction, particularly those which relate to the person and offices of the Messiah, whose day, approaching near, was seen at a less distance by those that prophesied, as Zechariah did, after the Babylonish captivity. For though in them the spirit of prophecy was expiring, and its light subsiding, yet was God pleased for the comfort of his few faithful people, to show them Christ's day at hand, that seeing it they might be encouraged to persevere, notwithstanding the dark clouds that were gathering thick around them. Accordingly the Messiah is spoken of by this prophet as well as by Haggai and Malachi, in not a few places, with as much clearness as by Isaiah himself, who lived in the bright

day of prophetic inspiration, and so evidently, that his words are not capable of any other application. Of the truth of this observation, I might, if necessary, produce several instances. You cannot, however, but observe them in perusing the prophecy, and will find them peculiarly worthy of your serious and frequent consideration. Of those passages, this which I have now read is one, manifestly inapplicable to any one but Christ. And it seems particularly suitable for our meditation in the season of Advent.

In this passage we have,

I. THE PERSON, COMING, AND WORK OF THE MESSIAH.

As this Prophet, with the two others just mentioned, prophesied after the return from Babylon; so it was during the building of the second temple. At that time the High-priest was Joshua, a person of the same name with the successor of Moses, and equally with him an eminent type of Christ. The former Joshua was a type of him as the Captain of our salvation, and the latter as the High-priest of our profession. Both of them, in their day, were also, under God, saviours of the people, as their name (the same with *Jesus*) signifies, and leaders in Canaan.

But a particular circumstance occurred to this latter Joshua, by the Divine appointment, on purpose that he might be a type of Christ; as a "Priest after the order of Melchizedek," both King and Priest. "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son

of Zephaniah; then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the High priest." (Ver. 9—11.) Some suppose there were two crowns provided, one of silver, denoting his priestly dignity; and the other of gold, to signify his glory as a King. But as he was a Priest already, and had a crown of gold to denote his honour in that character; these crowns of silver and gold might both be intended to signify the royal dignity; the silver one to typify the kingdom of the Messiah, when he was upon earth, and was "King of Israel," (John i. 49.) and the crown of gold his kingdom in his exalted state, the glory of which as far exceeds that of the former, as gold doth silver.

"And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts." Here, the prophet shows the meaning of this sign. On it is ingrafted a prediction, and the sign was used, that the prediction might be the more noticed, and the better remembered, *viz.* that God, in the fulness of time, would raise up a great High Priest, like Joshua, of whom he was but the figure and a faint shadow. "Speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH." —

The human nature of our Lord is chiefly intended by the expression, "the man whose name is The BRANCH." For, considered in his Divine nature, he is not the branch out of the stem of Jesse or David, but their *root*, as he is termed, Isai. xi. 10; Rev. v. 5; xxii. 16. Here he is spoken of as the offspring of David; because "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Rom. i. 3.) This name of The Branch is often given him in Holy Scripture, as in ch. iii. 8; Isai.

iv. 2; xi. 1; liii. 2, and especially, Jer xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15. In his human nature, he was small in his beginning, even as to his kingdom as well as his person; and mean in his appearance, as a mere bud or sprout, but gradually flourishing, and becoming great and fruitful. As a Branch he was to be cut off, but would produce sprouts, branches, and trees of righteousness innumerable. "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me" (John xii. 32.)

His *coming* is next spoken of. "He shall grow up." Though you may suspect the root to be dry and dead, yet assuredly it is not; the branch will spring up, the Messiah, who shall be both Priest and King, will make his appearance in due time. "Out of his place;" out of the tribe and family, and in the place foretold. The Hebrew, **מתחתיו יצמח** is literally "He shall spring up from under himself;" *propria virtute*; by his own power, or by the power of his own Spirit; he shall be both stock and stem to himself.* The words seem evidently to express his miraculous conception, described under another figure, "The stone cut without hands." (Dan. ii. 34.)

His *work*. "He shall build the temple of the Lord." In a subordinate sense this may refer to the second temple. He would stand by those engaged in erecting it, though unseen, and enable them to complete the structure. Neither Zerubbabel, nor Joshua, nor all the Jews uniting with them, would be able to complete it without him. This house was a temple far inferior to that spiritual building, which the Messiah was to raise, beautify, preserve, and honour.

* Υποκατωθεν αυτου ανατελει.—LXX.

This temple is the Gospel Church; "the spiritual house," in which God dwells. (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; 2 Cor. vi. 16;) the temple in which he will manifest his grace and glory, and be worshipped in spirit and in truth. (1 Peter ii. 4, 5.) As in the temple God made discoveries of himself to his people, and received their service and homage; so, in the Gospel Church, the light of Divine Revelation shines by the Word and Spirit, and sacrifices of prayer and praise are offered continually.

The foundation of this house, or temple, is, the doctrine of the Apostles and Prophets. (Matt. xvi. 18; Eph. ii. 20.) It is, therefore, said to have twelve foundations. (Rev. xxi. 14.)—Christ himself is the foundation of the whole Church, its doctrines, privileges, and duties, are from him.—He is the chief corner-stone, (Psal. cxviii. 22,) supporting both the sides of the building, the Jewish and Gentile Church, uniting them, (Eph. ii. 13—15,) adorning them, placed as he is at the head of the corner.

Believers are stones in this building, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed, indeed, of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.)—They are at first in the quarry of nature and sin, cleaving to the earth.—Afterwards, they are loosened and dug out by the preaching of the Word, and the influence of the Spirit, being thus awakened, convinced of their guilt and sin, and made of a broken and contrite heart.—They are squared, hewn, and fitted for the building, by repentance and reformation of life.—They are drawn to it by desire and expectation.—They are built up, and made a part of it, by faith and confi-

dence.—They are united to the other stones by love.—They are adorned and beautified by all Divine graces, and virtues, and good works.

It is Christ's especial work to build this temple; "Even he shall build the temple of the Lord." (ver. 13.) The promise is repeated, to settle the Jews in the assured expectation of the thing. "And," it is added, "he shall bear the glory." The whole glory of the structure must be given to him, and no under-workman must rob him of it. Hence it is that he uses mean instruments, "the weak things of this world," and "base things, and things which are despised," "that no flesh shall glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 28, 29.)

But how is he qualified for building this spiritual house? In other words, for saving, and governing, and preserving his church?

Let us consider, therefore,

II. THE GLORIOUS OFFICES HE SUSTAINS, IN ORDER TO THE PERFORMANCE OF THAT WORK.

"He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a Priest upon his throne."

The honours of the priesthood and royalty had been divided between the house of Aaron, and that of David; but now he alone shall bear the glory of both. Glory is, in general, a burden, and this twofold glory would be a double burden; but it would not be too heavy for him to bear, who "upholdeth all things." He bore the "cross," which was his glory, and he bears the crown; an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. Eliakim appears to have been a type of Christ, of whom it was said, "They shall hang on him all the glory of his

father's house." (Isai. xxii. 24.) He shall receive such honour and dignity, that "the glory of the latter house shall be greater than that of the former."

The glory conferred upon him includes both dignity and dominion; exalted honour and extensive power.

Honour. "When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." (Heb. i. 6.) "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." (John v. 22, 23.) He hath "given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." (Phil. ii. 9, 10.) "When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb. i. 3.)

Power. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18.) He is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." (Eph. i. 21.) "He is able to subdue all things to himself." (Phil. iii. 21.)

The throne is his—by birth-right;—by donation of his Father:—by purchase;—and by conquest; it is his most undoubted right.

On this throne he shall "*sit* and rule."

This speaks at once his royal magnificence;—the perpetuity of his dominion,—and the ease with which he rules. —

But where does his power extend, or who are the subjects over whom he rules? We answer,—The world, by his Providence, judging and punishing, or sparing and pardoning, destroying, chastening, or pre-

serving, enriching, and blessing nations, cities, families, or individuals.—His Church, by his word, especially his laws, by his Spirit, and the exercise of discipline.—He rules in the hearts of his people by his grace. Christ, who is ordained to offer sacrifice for us, is authorized to give law to us. He will not save us, unless we be willing he should *govern* us. (Heb. v. 9.) God has prepared him a throne in the heavens, and if we would have any benefit by that, we must prepare him one in our hearts, and be willing and glad that he should sit and rule there, and desire that every thought should be brought into subjection to him.

On this throne he is a *Priest*.—With the majesty and power of a *King*, he has the tenderness and sympathy of a *Priest*, who being “taken from among men, is ordained for men, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.” (Heb. v. 1, 2.)—In all the acts of his government as a *King*, he prosecutes his intentions as a *Priest*. None, therefore that believe in, and are subject to him, need to regard his throne, though a throne of glory and judgment, with terror and amazement, for as “there is a rainbow round about the throne,” so there is a Priest sitting upon it. — —

Let us notice what he does for his people, as a Priest. Appearing in the presence of God.—He presents the merit of his great sacrifice before him, (as the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the victims slain on the day of annual atonement before the mercy-seat,) and thus takes away the guilt of sin, and procures for us the Holy Spirit to break its power, and purge away its

nature.—He presents to the Father our prayers and praise, and all our services, and renders them acceptable to him.—He joins his prayers to ours, and “ever lives to intercede” for us. (Heb. vii. 25; Rev. viii. 3.)—As the fruit of his intercession, he sends us “grace to help in time of need.”—He pleads our cause as our advocate against the accuser.—As our fore-runner, he prepares a place for us. — —

His office as a Priest is no diminution to his dignity as a King. But his dignity as a King gives efficacy to his intercessions and services as a Priest. He intercedes, sitting at his Father’s right hand, as one having authority. (Rom. viii. 34.) We have such a High Priest, as Israel never had, for he “is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” (Heb. viii. 1.) He that appears for us within the veil, sits and rules there. No wonder that the effect is most blessed and glorious.

This we must now attend to, as the next particular to be considered.

III. THE BLESSED RESULT OF HIS EXECUTING THESE OFFICES FOR HIS PEOPLE.

“The counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

Some understand this of a counsel for the peace of man between the Father and the Son; or between Jehovah, on the one hand, and the man “whose name is The Branch,” on the other; *i. e.* the counsel concerning the peace to be made between God and man, by the mediation of the Messiah, which shall appear to have been concerted with infinite wisdom in the covenant of Redemption.

But the words will hardly bear this interpretation. It is the Father that speaks in the text, and says, "Behold the man whose name is The Branch," and who adds, "the counsel of peace shall be between them both." But if what has been above mentioned, be the meaning, it should rather have been expressed, "The counsel of peace shall be between *us* both." It seems, therefore, more probable, that the kingly and priestly offices of Christ are here referred to, the words signifying that the peace made for God's people shall rest on these two offices; that Christ, by his priestly office, should make peace for them with God, and by his kingly office should deliver them from their spiritual enemies; that by the former he should expiate sin, and by the latter extirpate it; that as a Priest he should purchase, and as a King maintain peace; that as a Priest he should reconcile God to man, and as a King man to God; that as a Priest he should procure for us the Divine favour, and as a King afford us the Divine protection.—As we can have no right either to justification or peace with God, but through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, (Eph. ii. 16—18;) so we cannot be put in possession of these blessings unless through the kingly authority and power of him, who is "exalted a Prince and Saviour to give repentance" and faith.—And if we were even in possession of these blessings, we could not retain them but in the way of subjection to his authority, and obedience to his laws. Pardon, the Divine favour, peace of conscience, and "peace with all men," can only be preserved by any, by means of submission and obedience to him as a King. And yet our obedience being imperfect, to

retain peace, we must rely only on the sacrifice and intercession of our High Priest.

INFERENCES.

Is Christ's great errand, and work on earth, to build the temple of the Lord? Then ought we not to be workers together with him, and not obstruct, but help forward his work?—Ought we not to inquire whether we be stones in this building, or be only lying beside it, or even yet in the natural quarry? — —

Is he a King, who rules upon his throne? Then are we in subjection to him? There is no peace for those who violate his laws. — —

Is he a Priest? Then do we rely on his sacrifice and mediation? there can be no peace for the self-righteous. — —

Is he a Priest on his throne? Then what encouragement is afforded to those who mourn for sin, and are conscious of the weakness of their faith. (Heb. iv. 15.) — —

SERMONS AND PLANS

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

LVI.

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE CONSIDERED.

MATTHEW III. 2.

Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

SUCH was the general doctrine of the most holy man, and the greatest Divine Messenger, that had appeared in the Church of God till that period, the harbinger of the Messiah, and the morning star that introduced “the Day-spring from on high,” and the dawn of Gospel-light. *John*, whose very name, given him by Divine appointment, signifies *grace*, was not conceived and born by mere principles of nature; but his parents being well stricken in years, his mother being always barren and now past age, he was like Isaac, a “child of promise,” and produced supernaturally. He was also “filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb,” and when he entered on his public ministry, came forth “in the spirit and power of Elias,” the great restorer of the law; and although he performed no miracle, received the following testimony from God’s incarnate Son: “Among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist,” (Matt. xi. 11.) *i. e.* any one more holy, more enlightened in Divine mysteries, and especially any one commissioned in a more extraordinary way, or for a more important purpose. “For this was he of whom it was written, Behold I send my messenger

before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee " (Matt. xi. 10.) "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (ch. iii. 3.) "All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John." (Matt. xi. 13.) In him the former dispensation ended, and a new dispensation was begun. He was the link that united the two together. And from his days, "the kingdom of God was preached," nay, "suffered violence, and the violent have taken it by force." (Matt. xi. 12.)

How self-denying was this man, and mortified to all below! His raiment was "of camel's hair," a kind of sackcloth, coarse and rough, made of the raw, long hair of camels; and his meat such as the wilderness in which he preached afforded, the insects called locusts, a kind of large winged grasshoppers, (Rev. ix. 3, 7, 9,) which the law allowed him to eat, "and wild honey," found in hollow trees, or in the clefts of the rocks. These uncommon circumstances of his public appearance concurred, with the time of it, to awaken in the people a great regard to his ministry. For the Roman yoke began to bear hard upon them, and their uneasiness under it raised in their minds the most impatient desire of the Messiah's advent, by whom they expected deliverance. Many of them, indeed, expected that John himself was the Messiah. "Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan," that is, great multitudes from these parts, "and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Ver. 5, 6.) To this confession, which, no doubt, in many was sincere, at least for that time, they were brought by the Holy Ghost accompanying his impressive doctrine, sanctioned and en-

forced by his holy life, and heavenly spirit; the substance of which doctrine was, as stated in the text, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

We shall better understand this exhortation of John, if we consider,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM IT WAS ADDRESSED.

It appears from the third chapter of St. Luke, in which a more particular account is given of John's preaching, and of the character of his hearers, that many of them were soldiers, and others publicans, or Roman tax-gatherers. These were, in general, notoriously wicked, but many of them, it appears, were now brought to a temporary repentance, and are willing to know, and do, the will of God. (See Luke iii. 14, 12, 10) For "the soldiers demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do?" "And he said, Do violence to no man;" commit no violence on any man's person or property; "neither accuse any falsely;" do not turn informers, and give false evidence against innocent persons, in order that, under the protection of the law, you may oppress them, and enrich yourselves with their spoils; "and be content with your wages;" live quietly on your pay, and do not mutiny when your officers do not bestow on you donations and caresses, to conciliate your favour.—The publicans came also to be baptized; a set of men these, whose office it was to collect the taxes, which the Romans had imposed on the Jews, and to pay them to others who were called the chief of the publicans; being generally, persons of an infamous character for injustice

and oppression. Nevertheless these people applied to John under a strong conviction of their guilt, “and said, Master, what shall we do,” to testify the sincerity of our repentance? “And he said Exact no more than is appointed you.” He did not require them to quit their employment, but to take care that, in levying the taxes, they exacted of no man more than his just proportion. “And the people asked him, What shall we do,” to avoid the judgments of God? “He answered, He that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise.” Be careful, not only to observe the ceremonies of religion, but to attend to the great duties of justice, mercy, and charity.

It is evident, that the bulk of the people that flocked into the wilderness to hear the Baptist, were professedly members of the Jewish Church. Hence they were in general expectation of the coming of the Messiah. and “mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.” (Luke iii. 15.) Many, however, were open sinners, wholly unconcerned about true religion, and only looked for, and desired, a temporal Messiah. And among these were many of their two great sects, the Sadducees and Pharisees. (Ver 7.)

The Sadducees were a kind of Infidels, not indeed Atheists, but Deists, and that of a gross description. For although they admitted the existence of one God, and acknowledged that he spake and gave the law by Moses, they affirmed that “there is no resurrection of the dead, neither angel nor spirit.” (Acts xxiii. 8; Matt. xxii. 23.) They believed, indeed, that God was a Spirit, and that there had been angels, by whom the law had been given; but, they thought, after the giving

of the law, that none existed; and that when, in the law, they are said so often to appear, they were framed, at that particular time for that purpose, and afterwards ceased to have any being. They allowed, that in the present world there is a spirit in man; but, as Josephus testifies, denied "the permanency of the soul after death," or that any spirits existed in a state of separation from men's bodies; and, of course, denied also that any spirits, separated from the body, could appear, or reveal any thing to mankind. Therefore, they had no hopes or fears, and looked for neither good nor evil beyond the present life. Nevertheless, they came to John's baptism, expecting deliverance from the Roman yoke, and temporal wealth, honour, and power, through him, as the Messiah. ♦

The Pharisees held very different principles. St. Luke, in the passage just quoted, says, they confessed those truths which the Sadducees denied, *viz.* the resurrection, and the existence of angels and separate spirits. This, it is well known, was the strictest sect, as well as the most numerous among the Jews. They were very exact, although, in general, greatly mistaken in the interpretation of their law; professing a perfect acquaintance with the traditions of the elders, which they held to be of equal authority with the written word; and they were rigorous in their observance of them, as well as of all the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation. Many of them, also, were very strict in performing moral duties, at least as far as concerned external matters; "living in all good conscience before God," as St. Paul had done while a Pharisee; and, "touching the righteousness of the law, blameless." (Phil. iii. 6.) They were, however, generally

unacquainted with their sinfulness and guilt, their natural weakness and misery, because they had no proper conception of the spirituality, extent, and obligation of the moral law. Hence they were self-righteous, and self-dependent, and either hypocrites, or mere formalists, “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” (2 Tim. iii. 5.) They trusted in circumcision, and the expiations of their law, and, especially, on their being children of Abraham; and, in the midst of all this, according to the testimony of our Lord and his Evangelists, were covetous, and “lovers of the world, more than lovers of God.”

Such was the character of John’s hearers! And, have we not in all our congregations?—have we not here, persons of a similar character? — —

II. WHAT THE EXHORTATION, OR INJUNCTION, JOHN GAVE THEM, IMPLIES.

“Repent ye.”

There are two words thus translated in the New Testament. The one, μετανοεω, here used, means *after-thought* and *consideration*, or *reflection*, and also *a change of mind*; and the other, μεταμελομαι, *after-care*, or *concern*, or *sorrow*. Taken together, they admirably express the Scripture doctrine of repentance.

It consists in, or rather, it begins with, *after-thought*, *after-consideration*, or *reflection*. There can be no repentance without considering, or reflecting upon our past principles, spirit, and conduct.—We must reflect upon our actions; the sins we have committed, and the duties we have neglected, both towards God, our neigh-

bour, and ourselves.—Upon our words, whether true or false, profane or devout, charitable or uncharitable, serious or trifling, edifying or useless.—Upon our motives; even the counsels of our hearts.—Upon our tempers and desires.—Upon our imaginations and thoughts.—Upon our sentiments and views of things, which are the sources whence all the rest proceed.

All these must be compared with the word of God in general, and with the preceptive part of it, his law, in particular, and that with great care and exactness.

In order to self-knowledge, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary, and must be sought in prayer.

Hence arise,—Conviction of our sinfulness by nature and practice, of our guilt, depravity, and weakness,—And humiliation; we shall have a very mean opinion of ourselves, notwithstanding any qualifications, natural or acquired, being sensible we are not worthy of God's notice, or of the good opinion of any fellow-creature.

Thus (μεταμελεια) *after-concern* and *care* is produced; which implies—Sorrow for the dishonour done to God, and the misery brought on ourselves, and perhaps, also on others.—A deep concern to escape that misery, to save our own souls, and to be instrumental of saving others, to repair, if possible, the dishonour done to God.

This repentance, so far as it arises, first, from the knowledge of the law, has been termed by many *legal*; and as it arises from an acquaintance with the mercy and grace of God in the Gospel, it has been called *Evangelical*. — —

It is then properly, (*μετανοια*), a change of mind and heart. A change of the apprehension, judgment, conscience, will, affections, all the tempers and dispositions.

Hence fruits are brought forth worthy of repentance. (Matt. iii. 7—10; Luke iii. 7—14.) These are illustrated, 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. — — —

Such was the doctrine which the forerunner of the Messiah inculcated upon the Jews, to prepare them for his dispensation, and inculcated as of immediate and indispensable necessity. “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” (Matt. iii. 10.) This doctrine is equally necessary to be inculcated upon us, of whatever description we be, Pharisees, Sadducees, or open sinners, and yet professing to be members of the church of God, and as a doctrine demanding our first attention.

III. THE MOTIVE BY WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS ENFORCED.

“For the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” *ἤγγικε*, *hath approached*, or *is come*.

It is to be observed that this phrase, “The kingdom of heaven,” generally used by St. Matthew, is perfectly similar to that used by the other Evangelists and St. Paul, “The kingdom of God.”

It means the Gospel dispensation, in opposition to the Law; (Luke ix. 60; Matt. xxi. 43; xiii. 31, 33, 47;) and is so termed, because under the Gospel, God, in his mercy, rescues mankind from the dominion of sin

and Satan, and gathers to himself subjects by his Son. Under this dispensation “the Day-Spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke i. 78, 79.) Therein are clearly revealed the fall and depravity of mankind, their sinfulness and guilt, weakness and misery; the evil and destructive tendency of sin, the way of deliverance from its guilt and power; the nature and attributes of God, particularly his justice and mercy, his holiness and love; the person, offices, undertaking, the love, sufferings, humiliation, and exaltation of Christ; the nature, necessity, happy consequences, and attainableness of justification and salvation through faith in him; the beauty, excellency, necessity, of holiness and righteousness; especially, “life and immortality are brought to light,” and the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future judgment, fully declared. And thus, at once, is a foundation laid for repentance, its expediency and necessity are shown, and we are rendered inexcusable if we do not partake of it.—The Gospel likewise brings grace as well as light. It offers a free and full pardon for the past, and that from a manifestation of divine mercy, in a way consistent with justice; and thus gives encouragement to repent. It affords us help and power, even the fulness of the Spirit, not given formerly; (John vii. 37, 38;) and thus enables us to fulfil this duty.

“The kingdom of heaven,” or, “of God,” implies his conquering and triumphing over Satan, and overthrowing his kingdom, and visibly subjecting all the powers of nature, to his will, which evidently displayed

the authority of God, as King over all. See Matt. xii. 28; Luke x. 9—11, 17—20. This awfully sanctions the Gospel doctrine, shows its certain truth and deep importance, and, therefore, strongly enforces repentance. — —

“The kingdom of heaven,” or, “of God,” appears, in other passages, to mean the Gospel Church. (Matt. xiii. 24; xx. 1; xxv. 1.) This, indeed is properly the kingdom of Christ, of God, and of heaven on earth, governed by Christ, the King of saints, who, while members of it, are prepared for his heavenly kingdom. Now we cannot be subjects of this kingdom without repentance. — —

“The kingdom of heaven,” it may be observed, further, here means that kingdom which “cometh not with observation;” which is “within” men; “not in word but in power,”—the kingdom which is “not meat and drink,”—not merely right opinions,—not complying with divine institutions,—not the use of means,—not an external good conduct.—But which is righteousness—peace,—joy, in the Holy Ghost. And there is no possibility of obtaining this kingdom without repentance. — —

The Millennial reign of Christ on earth, is sometimes intended by the expression. “I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Psalm ii. 8.) “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,” upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom. (Isa. ix. 7.) This is at hand. But we cannot partake of it, or help it forward without repentance. — —

The kingdom of heaven, or of God, finally means the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is at hand; for death, paradise, the resurrection, are at *hand*. And into this kingdom we cannot possibly enter without repentance. (Luke xiii. 3.)

CONCLUSION.

How the repentance, the nature and necessity of which has been explained, can be acquired, may be readily deduced from what has been said under the first head; but in the use of all the means of attaining it, we must not fail to look to Him, and rely on “HIM whom God hath exalted,”—to give repentance, as well as forgiveness of sins.” (Acts v. 31.) —

LVII.

THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT.

MATTHEW III. 11.

He shall Baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

SUCH was a part, and an important part of the testimony of John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, concerning that Messiah, whose forerunner he was. And, when we consider the character and office of this most holy, and highly illuminated servant of God, who, according to Christ himself, was greater than all that had preceded him, we must regard his testimony as

unspeakably important and interesting. The angel Gabriel, who predicted John's birth, described his character and office as follows; "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke i. 15—18; comp. Matt. iii. 3; and Mark i. 2, 3.)

Now of the doctrine and ministry of this extraordinary messenger of the Most High, we have the fullest account in the preceding verses, and in the parallel passages of St. Luke and St. John. — —

The words of the text appear to be part of the reply which John made to the Priests and Levites, whom the Jews sent from Jerusalem to inquire. "Who art thou?" and, "Why baptizest thou, if thou be not that Christ, &c?" Having stated that his baptism was "with water unto repentance," to represent the reformation of life, and purity of heart, which were requisite to receive the Messiah, the water being a sign of the washing away of sin, he here declares the superior efficacy of that baptism which he, that should come after him, would administer. He would baptize, not only with water, the outward emblem of regeneration, but with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, which in their operation resemble fire, and which he would shed abundantly on those who should believe in him.

Let us consider.

I. THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE BAPTISM
HERE MENTIONED.

The Holy Spirit; who is elsewhere represented under the emblems of water and air, or wind, is here, and in a few other places, set forth under that of fire. And this, perhaps, is the most perfect and proper emblem under which his influences can be exhibited. "Fire," in itself, independent of the fuel on which it feeds, suppose, the subtile electric fluid diffused through and pervading all nature, (being under God, perhaps, the source of vegetation, animal heat, motion,) is the most pure, spiritual, active, powerful, and incorruptible, and, therefore, the most perfect of all the elements; and is, consequently, of all others, the fittest emblem of that pure, invisible, powerful, incorruptible, infinite and omnipresent Spirit, concerning whom David speaks, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Psalm cxxxix. 7—10.)

But, as thus considered, the sign and thing signified, the figure and the reality, are equally invisible. We shall have a better idea, therefore, of the subject, if we call to mind the operations of fire, when rendered visible by feeding on fuel. It enlightens, quickens, warms, purifies, consumes, and transforms into its own nature. And in these particulars, we have most or all of the reasons why the Holy Spirit is compared

to fire, and why those endued with it are said to be baptized with fire.

It is true, there may be some reference in the text to the cloven or distinct tongues, or flames of fire, which rested on the heads of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, an emblem of the gift of tongues then bestowed, and of the zeal, power and irresistible energy with which they should testify the resurrection of Christ, and the Gospel of God. But as this gift, it seems, was confined to the Apostles, or, at least, to the disciples of that period, and as the baptism in my text is promised to the multitude in general, this could not be the Baptist's principal meaning.

The Holy Ghost, therefore, is compared to fire, because—He enlightens the previously dark mind, in the knowledge of God and divine things.—He quickens the soul previously dead to God, “dead in trespasses and sins.” “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” (John vi. 63.)—He warms the heart, the affections of which were previously cold, by kindling within desire, gratitude, love, zeal, towards God. (Luke xxiv. 32.)—He purifies the spirit, naturally polluted and corrupt, (Mal. iii. 2, 3.)—He consumes our sins, lusts and vanities. (Isa. iv. 4.)—He transforms us into his own nature —

The importance of this baptism appears in all these particulars. It is not only expedient, and conducive, but absolutely necessary, to our salvation, that we should be enlightened, warmed, purified, have our sins consumed, and be transformed into the Divine nature,

Perhaps the expression “baptize,” here used, may be intended to signify, that the influence of the Spirit is generally given at a particular time.—

But let us consider.

II. THE CHARACTER AND DIGNITY OF THE PERSON WHO BAPTIZES WITH IT.

One mightier than John the Baptist is the author of this blessing, “whose shoes he was not worthy to bear.” Therefore—He was not a mere man. If, as some have contended, Christ had been the son of Joseph and Mary, John, as to his origin at least, would have been superior to him. For John was given to his parents by a miracle, after Elizabeth had been continually barren, and after she was past childbearing, and Zacharias also was stricken in age—

He was not only miraculously begotten, although as such he certainly could not be termed a mere man; but his miraculous conception does not account for John Baptist’s expression. (John i. 26—34; iii. 25—36.) Nor does it account for what our Lord himself testifies. (John vi. 52—54, 58, 61, 62, 68; viii. 56, 58; xvii. 5, 24,)

He was the son of God, and God. For God alone can baptize with the Holy Ghost. Hence, said Christ, “Behold *I send* the Promise of my Father upon you.” (Luke xxiv. 49; John iv. 4; xvi. 7.)

He dispenses this blessing, however, as the fruit of his mediation, his sacrifice and intercession. For we could not have received the Holy Ghost in a way consistent with the holiness and justice of God, if our sins had not been expiated. But, a sacrifice of expiation

having been offered, the most ignorant, sinful, and guilty may obtain his sacred influences. Hence we consider,

III. THE PERSONS WHO MAY PARTAKE OF THIS BAPTISM.

It was promised—To the Pharisees, persons generally formal, superstitious, self-righteous, hypocritical, proud, censorious, malicious, vindictive, persecuting. — —

—To the Sadducees, who were infidels as to the invisible, spiritual, and eternal world; Deists, if not Atheists, and wholly devoted to the pursuit of wealth, ambition, and sensual pleasure.—

—To the whole multitude, (Luke iii. 7,) among whom were,—Publicans, (ver. 12,) generally unjust and oppressive, (ver. 13,) and otherwise gross sinners.—And Soldiers, (ver. 14,) guilty of fraud, deceit, false evidence, perjury, and violence.—

The whole of them are termed, according to St. Matthew and St. Luke, on account of their craft, guile, malice, and mischievousness, “a generation,” or brood, “of vipers.”

That even these might have been made partakers of, and were encouraged to expect this baptism, is a demonstration that it was not principally meant of those “tongues of fire,” which sat upon the heads of the twelve Apostles, and others of the disciples on the day of Pentecost; but which were certainly never meant to be conferred promiscuously on the multitude.—

IV. ON WHAT TERMS, OR IN WHAT WAY THEY MAY
HAVE IT CONFERRED.

On those of repentance towards God, (Matt. iii. 2, 8—11; Luke iii. 3,) conviction, humiliation, contrition, confession for sin, and “bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.” — —

—Of faith in the Messiah. (John vii. 38; xx. 31; iii. 15, 16, 18.) — —

—Of faith in the truths and promises of God. (Matt. xxi. 22; Gal. iii. 13, 14; James i. 5, 6.) — —

The aids afforded to comply with these terms are, “The light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;” (John i. 9;) reflected from the works of God, reason, conscience. Hence (Rom. i. 18—20,) “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,—because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”—Divine revelation, to those that have it.—Corrections and other dispensations of Providence.—The ministry of God’s word and his ordinances.—The example of God’s people.—Preparatory influences of grace, inspiring repentance and even faith in Christ, and in God’s promises, and even a measure of love and power to obey. Hence the necessity of keeping Christ’s commandments as the test of our loving him. (John xiv. 15, 21, 23.)

INFER,

The duty of those that are not baptized with the Spirit.—To consider its necessity.—To be concerned for their want of it, and earnestly to desire it.—To seek it in the way God hath marked out, sincerely, earnestly, diligently, perseveringly. — —

The duty of those who have received this baptism, not to quench this heavenly light and fire Now fire may be quenched by pouring water upon it; by heaping upon it earth and ashes; by withholding fuel from it; by neglecting to stir it up. So may the operations of the Spirit be quenched by the commission of known and wilful sin; by immersing our minds too deeply in worldly business, and burdening them with worldly cares; by omitting to use the private and public means of grace, the fuel provided to nourish the sacred fire; and by neglecting to “stir up the gifts” and graces which are in us. We should be careful that we do not, in any of these ways, quench the influences of the Spirit, but, by a contrary behaviour, promote and increase them.

LVIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MEEK.

MATTHEW v. 5.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

HAPPINESS, which is implied in the word rendered “blessed,” in this and the other beatitudes, was the great object to which the philosophers of antiquity professed to lead their hearers, and is the end, to the pursuit of which all are led, as by an innate principle. Our Lord, therefore, whose great business in coming into the world was to render men happy by making them holy, wisely began his sermon on the Mount, which is the longest public discourse he is recorded to have delivered, by pointing out the connection between happiness and holiness, and exciting his hearers to the pursuit of the latter, as the infallible means of obtaining the former. And to render his instructions better adapted to engage the attention of the hearers, he delivers those, which have been called Beatitudes, in the form of paradoxes, containing in the first view, declarations that seem to be erroneous; but which, on a close and attentive consideration, are found to be most weighty and serious truths.

Each of them is grounded on the natural state of man, as a lost and fallen creature. And they contain not so many independent and separate propositions, but an orderly and connected view of those gracious dispositions which must be produced in our souls, in order

to our reception of the kingdom of Christ, and all the blessings, both present and future, revealed in his Gospel. And it may be remarked, that every succeeding beatitude pertinently follows the foregoing. We have before examined those respecting poverty of spirit and mourning;* which are naturally followed by that containing the text. He that is "poor in spirit," from a deep conviction of spiritual ignorance and sinfulness, guilt and depravity, frailty and mortality, and therefore thinks meanly of himself, and mourns for his situation, with that "godly sorrow" which worketh repentance, he only can possess that mild and even disposition implied in meekness of spirit, which renders us composed and contented, under every treatment we may experience from God or man. This meekness only can exist where the way hath been prepared by poverty of spirit, and mourning for sin. It is a temper much spoken of and commended in Holy Scripture, and very necessary to be considered.

Observe, therefore,

I. THE NATURE OF MEEKNESS.

When meekness is mentioned in conjunction with patience, gentleness, love, and other social tempers, it is to be taken in the strictest sense, as having only a respect to injuries and affronts received from men, and as being opposed to anger and resentment. But in other places, as in Matt. xi. 29, and in this passage, we may consider it as implying much more, namely,—

* The Author had written plans of sermons on verse, 3 and 4, of which the former is not found among his papers, and the latter appears too imperfect for publication. E.

a just composure of mind, amidst the varying circumstances and situations of life, whether reputed good or evil; or the holding of our passions and affections in even balance.—By the passions I here mean, that love, desire, hope, joy, or the contrary, which arise from apprehending any thing good or evil.

Consider then, first, as they respect the supposed evils of life, such as sickness, poverty, disgrace. These, to natural men, are the objects of unreasonable and inordinate fear, abhorrence, sorrow, and hatred. —

But to the meek they are not so. Under all afflictions from God, those of this disposition are patient, calm, composed, and tranquil.—They are resigned to the will of God, desiring to live in subjection to him, and with a view to his glory. “For conscience *toward God* they endure grief.” (1 Pet. ii. 19.) This arises from a conviction that God’s providence superintends all, the most minute events; that he has power and authority to do what he will with us, and, that, consequently, it is wrong, and vain to resist; and moreover, that love is the one source of his dispensations, in all of which he intends only their good and his glory.—They, likewise, bear with meekness, properly so called, the affronts and injuries they may receive from their fellow-creatures; considering that, though man is the immediate agent of such sufferings, it is through the permission of God they have power to afflict us. — —

Consider the passions, secondly, as they respect the supposed good things of life, such as riches, health, honour. These, to natural men, are the objects of unreasonable and inordinate love, desire, hope, and joy. — — Not so to the meek: their love, desire,

hope, and joy, are in due subordination to the will of God, and only excited with a view to his glory. — —

They feel that they are dependant on God, and not on the creature, and receive all their good things as from him.—They are thankful for them.—They are moderate in the enjoyment of them. (Phil. iv. 5—8; 1 Cor. vii. 29—36.) — —

Hence, in general, “the peace of God keeps their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

II. THE HAPPINESS OF THE MEEK.

They enjoy life as none else do. For, as far as they are really governed by this temper, the evils of life do not harm them; these storms blow over them. And the good things of life are relished by them, as they are by none other, inasmuch as they think they are undeserving of any thing good.—Such are peculiarly dear to God. (1 Pet. iii. 4.)—They are under his particular direction and protection. (Psal. xxv. 9; lxxvi. 2.)—They are in the way to possess more of the good things of *this world*, as being most indifferent to them, and in the least danger of being hurt by them. (Psal. xxii. 26; xxxvii. 11.)—They have the peculiar consolations of the Spirit. (Isai. xxix. 19; lxi. 1.) Men are best disposed for the comforts of the Holy Ghost, when most composed in spirit, and most disengaged from creature-comfort.—They are in the way to be more useful on earth, as they are the fittest persons for doing good.—They shall have the most glory in heaven. “They shall inherit,” at least, “the new heavens, and the new earth,” which they earnestly look for, and which the Divine mercy will soon open to their en-

raptured view, and wherein, being made perfect in righteousness, they shall dwell in everlasting felicity and joy.

LIX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATTHEW v. 6.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after
righteousness; for they shall be filled.*

THE state, or temper of mind, represented in this beatitude, is a consequence of those before spoken of; the fourth step in religion. No man can “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” till he become, first, “poor in spirit;” secondly, “mourn” for his sins and those of others; thirdly, become “meek,” or of a gentle, long-suffering, and forgiving disposition.—All these dispositions are, however, at all times, found in every true child of God.—

Let us inquire,

I. WHO THEY ARE THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“Righteousness” sometimes signifies Justification; as in Rom. x. 4, 10; implying the pardon of sin, and the favour of God. (Rom. iii. 24, 25; iv. 7, 8.) This

is only granted on account of the merits of Christ, who is, therefore, called “our righteousness.” See Jer. xxiii. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30. And we can only be interested in him by faith, which is also called Righteousness.* (Rom. iv. 5.) Justification, then, is one object of the hunger and thirst here mentioned, and as the means of it, first, the merits of Christ, and in order to our interest therein a lively faith, which is “of the operation of God.” —

Righteousness also means Sanctification. See 1 John ii. 29; iii. 7; Eph. iv. 24; Rom. vi. 18, 19. This implies—A deliverance from the power of all sinful dispositions and practices. (Eph. iv. 22—33; Gal. v. 19—21.)—The attainment of all holy tempers, words, and works. (Gal. v. 22, 23.) If the tree be made good, the fruit will be good. There must be a new creation in order to a new conduct.—In particular, it implies

* The author here adopts a Scriptural language, but did not mean to insinuate that faith was, in any sense, to be the ground of our dependence before God, or to share, with Christ, the merit of our salvation. “The true understanding of this doctrine,” says the Church of England, in the second part of her Homily on Salvation, “That we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not that this our act to believe in Christ, or this our faith in Christ, which is within us, doth justify us, and deserve our justification unto us; (for that were to account ourselves to be justified by some act or virtue that is within ourselves;) but the true understanding and meaning thereof is, That although we hear God’s word, and believe it; although we have faith, hope, charity, repentance, dread, and fear of God within us; and do never so many works thereunto; yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues, of faith, hope, charity, and all other virtues, and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient, and imperfect, to deserve remission of our sins, and our justification; and therefore, we must trust only in God’s mercy, and that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the cross.—” E.

the love of God, and our neighbour, complying with these commands; (Mark xii. 30, 31;) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;" and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus is the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us. — —

The fruits of this love are an habitual and constant regard to every branch of outward obedience to the Divine commandments and ordinances, having a view to the honour of God; implying not merely harmlessness in our conduct and behaviour, but usefulness. — —

In order to this righteousness, the influences of the Spirit are the object of this thirst. — —

As to the nature of this thirst; the expression is figurative; implying, a sense of the want, both of pardon and holiness,—A desire of them, fervent and earnest, absorbing all other desires,—A constant, unceasing desire, till the object be enjoyed,—An increasing desire; the longer the blessing is delayed, the more we long for it;—A restless desire, not to be satisfied with any thing but righteousness; just as nothing but food can satisfy the hungry. — —

II. THE HAPPINESS OF SUCH.

They are happy in that they are delivered from any inordinate hunger and thirst after earthly and temporal things.—These are either unattainable, or unsatisfactory, or inconstant, and of short duration. Hence, from the desire of them, arise disappointment, dissatisfaction, and sorrow. — —

Righteousness, on the other hand, is attainable. “*They shall be filled.*” Many very great and precious promises are made respecting justification and sanctification; and, in order to both, respecting the gift of the Holy Spirit, which shall be faithfully fulfilled to all, who trust in them. (1 Thess. v. 24; 2 Pet. i. 4.) — —

Righteousness is satisfactory. How great the peace, and joy, and true happiness, that attend justification and sanctification! — —

Righteousness is a durable and constant blessing; it will continue with us through life, death, and eternity. — —

With this righteousness, they who hunger and thirst shall be filled. Their most enlarged desires shall be gratified. “*Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*” — —

These are to them glad tidings, good news; tidings which rejoice their heart, by assuring them, that their expectation shall not be cut off. It makes the covetous man happy to hear he may receive an accumulation of his property; the ambitious man, to hear he may obtain an increase of honour; the man of pleasure, to have the prospect of great addition to his enjoyments. Nothing so much rejoices the lover of God, as to hear that he may love God yet more. — —

LX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MERCIFUL

MATTHEW v. 7.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

You will recollect that these words are taken from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, the contents of which, in general, and every distinct and separate article of which, in particular, must appear in a most important and interesting point of view to all those who reflect on the solemn and awful manner in which our Lord applies and enforces the whole of it. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."—Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man," &c. (Ch. vii. 21, 24, &c.)

Now, surely, no sentence, in the whole of this important Sermon, appears more deserving our regard, than that I have read as my text, whether we consider it in reference to the relations in which we stand to God or to man, or the duty we owe to him, or to each other. If, in our present fallen, disordered, and miserable state we do stand in need of no Divine attribute so much as of mercy, and are under obligations to none more than this,—if there be no spiritual grace or social virtue, more needful to be exercised by one fellow-creature towards another,—and if God will have us

exercise mercy towards others, rather than to offer any sacrifice, however costly, to himself;—surely the words of our text are unspeakably momentous, and demand our most serious attention.

But,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING MERCIFUL? AND TO WHOM DOES THIS CHARACTER PROPERLY BELONG?

Mercy or *mercifulness*, is that quality or temper of mind, or, rather, that grace of the Spirit of God, whereby we sensibly feel, and are disposed to relieve the wants and miseries of our fellow creatures. It is opposed to that hardness of heart which renders us insensible to the calamities of other men, and to that selfishness and narrowness of mind, and cruelty, which makes us to withhold our help, and shut up our bowels of compassion for them in their distresses. It is nearly allied to benevolence, or kindness of heart; but properly speaking, is distinguishable from it, as being less general in its nature and exercise. For whereas kindness may be exercised towards persons in any state or situation, mercy always respects the miserable, or such as are suffering from real or supposed evils. As there would have been no room for Divine mercy towards us, if sin and misery had not entered into the world; so, were it not for our griefs and afflictions, there would be no place nor occasion for the mercy of one man towards another.

It must be carefully observed, however, that mercy has its chief seat in the heart, and does not principally consist in outward acts, although it is and must be manifested by them. A tender and sympathizing

spirit, that has a quick sense of another's griefs and dangers, and is touched with the feeling of them, is essential to this mercifulness. And actions that carry with them the greatest appearance of mercy and compassion, if they proceed not from such a temper, will not meet with acceptance from God. For St. Paul assures us that if a man "bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth him nothing." (1 Cor. xiii. 3.) Certainly, one of the strongest evidences that any one can give of a charitable disposition, is, his being ready to bestow all that he has, to relieve the necessity of others; and yet it appears that even such beneficence as this, may proceed from an impure source, and therefore, not be acceptable to God. It may proceed from a view to the praise of men, from a hope of atoning thereby for past sins, and of procuring the Divine favour; or from some other motive, very different from true love to God, and a merciful disposition towards man.

The *disposition*, therefore, must chiefly be regarded, and it must be remembered that a man may be truly merciful, who has it not in his power to give any great proof of it by his outward actions. For if he really sympathize with his neighbour in his distress, and have a willing mind to relieve him, in case he were able, "it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not." (2 Cor. viii. 12.) At the same time, it must also be observed, that if there really be such a disposition in any man, it will not fail to show itself by corresponding actions, according to the ability and opportunity which he hath. The person who ordinarily declines, or is backward to perform acts of mercy and compassion, is certainly not

merciful and compassionate. As Christianity is too spiritual to admit of a mere outward attendance on Divine ordinances in the place of piety, or mere outward acts of mercy, in the place of virtue; so it is too just and consistent, to give any countenance to a supposition that there are right dispositions in the heart, when a person's life and actions declare the contrary.

But this point will need a little further elucidation. A compassionate and merciful disposition towards our fellow-creatures, will exert and show itself in different ways, according to the different occasions afforded for its use. It may be called into exercise by men's spiritual wants, dangers, and miseries; or by their outward afflictions and sufferings; or, lastly, by the injuries they may have done us, on account of which they are, so to speak, at our mercy. I shall speak first of the last of these.

When men have injured us in our character, or property, or in any other way. as by tale-bearing and slandering, by throwing out reflections, injurious to our reputation, or by over-reaching, defrauding, oppressing us, and by a train of providences those very persons are in any manner made dependant on us, there is a peculiar occasion given for the exercise of our mercy towards them.—Governors, indeed, are not obliged to show mercy to such as disturb the public peace by forbearing to execute the laws against them. It is their office and duty to be a “terror to evil doers,” as well as “a praise to them that do well.” And it is one of the greatest blessings to the present disordered world, that there is such a power lodged in certain persons to restrain those from evil actions by the fear of punishment, who are not to be restrained by principle. If

punishments were not actually executed on bold offenders, laws would lose their force, society would be dissolved, and no one could live in security; a remission of punishment would in some cases, entail guilt upon the land, as in that of murder, where the law of God and nature require blood for blood. In others, it would be the greatest cruelty to society, by encouraging men to break the laws by hopes of impunity.—As to private injuries, Christianity does not, in all cases, oblige us to put up with them without endeavouring to do justice to ourselves in our reputation, or our property. Our usefulness may, in some degree, depend on our reputation, and therefore, when that is evidently attacked, and we cannot vindicate ourselves, without the prosecution and punishment of the offender, it is doubtless right to appeal to the law on our behalf. And in case of injury done us in our property, religion does not forbid us to take advantage of the laws of our country against lawless men. But a merciful man will maintain a sincere good will towards the person that has done him injury; will be truly sorry for his sin, and heartily desire his repentance and everlasting welfare. He will use mild methods at first to bring him to a sense of his injustice, and allow time for observing how they operate, exercising great long-suffering. If he has been wronged by any persons undesignedly, or if the Providence of God has unexpectedly reduced them, so as to disable them from answering his just demands upon them, he will not treat them with severity; to do this would be to fly in the face of Providence and to add affliction to the afflicted. If they have designedly injured him, but give proofs of true repentance, he will heartily forgive them whatever have been

their offences. He will in no case revenge any wrong he has received, or distress another when it will yield him no profit. Nor will he rigorously insist on his right, when it will materially hurt the offending party, and, perhaps, involve his family in great and protracted difficulties.

The outward wants, afflictions, and sufferings of others afford another occasion for the exercise of mercy. Necessitous circumstances of life, occurring in the ordinary course of things, or brought on by peculiar disasters or disappointments, the want of food or clothing, pains and diseases of body, troubles and perplexities of mind, suffering for conscience sake, or by ordinary injustice, violence and oppression, nay, and the sufferings which men bring on themselves by their folly or sins, will not be viewed by a merciful man with unconcern.—He will have an affecting sense of such distresses, and will sympathize with those that are involved in them. This, even common humanity, and much more Christianity, teaches. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (Phil. ii. 4.) Some, indeed, in their afflictions, have a peculiar and prior claim to our sympathy; as our relations, friends, acquaintances; (Job vi. 14;) and our fellow Christians; “whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” (1 Cor. xii. 26; see also Heb. xiii. 3.) But a general compassion is due to all; we are commanded to “weep with them that weep.” (Rom. xii. 15.)—We should be disposed to do them good as far as we have ability. We must not “shut up” the bowels of our compassion, as they do who satisfy themselves with tenderness of mind, when they have it in their power to contribute

to the relief of the distressed. The merciful man will not think it too much to part with his money, his food, or apparel, or even to undergo, some pain and labour, in order to soften the cares, divert the pains. remove the distempers, supply the wants resolve the doubts of others; he will encounter difficulties in righting the injured and oppressed; he will, especially, “draw out his soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul;” (Isai. lviii. 10;) he will “deal his bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to his house; when he sees the naked he will cover him, and hide not himself from his own flesh.” (Isai. lviii. 7.) Thus Job says, “If I did despise the cause of my man-servant, or maid-servant, what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him?—If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail.” &c. (Job xxxi. 13—22.) St. James shows the absurdity of pretending to sympathy without works agreeable therewith; (ch. ii. 15, 16;) and St. John exhorts us to show the sincerity of our love in this way. (1 Epist. iii. 17, 18.)—Nor must we only show mercy, but we must “*love* mercy;” (Mic. vi. 8;) we must exercise it cheerfully; we must delight in it as God doth.—When persons are not themselves in a capacity for relieving the necessities of others, they may exercise their compassion acceptably to God, by applying to those that are more capable. Thus they may serve three good purposes at once; they may evince their own charitable tempers, excite others to their duty, and also help the distressed. Or, if they should not know where to apply, yet all have one way left to show their love of mercy, and a

way that will both please God, and do good to men, and that is, by praying earnestly to God, the Father of mercies, for the distressed.

But still more the spiritual ignorance, the sinfulness, impenitence, and unbelief of men, will move the compassions of the truly merciful, and call forth the exercise of that disposition, in actions of benevolence and beneficence.

The ignorance of others, as to spiritual things, will excite our compassion. When we consider how God has exhibited his invisible perfections and nature in his works; his unity, incorporeity, immutability, knowledge, wisdom, power, justice, &c.; and how he has in different ages, raised up and inspired holy men to reveal his will to mankind; has confirmed that revelation, by signs and wonders, and that from age to age; has sent his blessed Son, his Word, wisdom, and truth; to be incarnated for our instruction; has attested and sealed his doctrine by his most holy life, his ignominious and painful death, his wonderful miracles, his resurrection and ascension;—we cannot but pity the infatuation, and tremble for the danger of those who remain inattentive to these things, and wilfully ignorant of the everlasting Gospel. For, “if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape who neglect so great salvation,” &c. (Heb. ii. 2, 3.) And if a view of their ignorance and inattention affect us, surely we shall use every means we can employ to remove it. — —

Again; the sinfulness and guilt of mankind will affect a merciful man. Surely it must give him much concern to see his fellow creatures involved in guilt

and depravity, condemnation and wrath, and insensible to their danger, and unconcerned about the salvation wherewith Christ came to save them; living under the power of a mortal distemper, and neglecting the only Physician that can heal it. — —

Their impenitence and unbelief, in particular, cannot but excite the compassion of a Christian mind, in as much as they reject the counsel of God against themselves; thus provoking the great God to jealousy, and throwing away their immortal souls; and laying up in store for a dreadful account at the last day. These things must greatly affect him. Thus the Psalmist, (Psal. cxix. 158,) “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not thy word.” Now if our concern be sincere, it will show itself in proper endeavours to save men from ignorance and ruin; by instructing, warning, reproofing, or exhorting them, or engaging others to do it; by supporting the Gospel, and praying earnestly for its success. (James v. 19, 20.) — —

These particulars being considered, we shall easily determine who are the merciful, here spoken of by our Lord. It is plain, they are not the merely moral and charitable. A man that is merciful in the last mentioned sense must be enlightened by the truth, and quickened by the grace of God. He must be spiritually minded; for only they, who are so, will be sensible of, and justly affected with the spiritual indigence, dangers, and miseries of mankind. They are, therefore, evidently right, who, in these *beatitudes*, as they have been called, understand our Lord as speaking, not of several detached and unconnected particulars, but of graces or virtues so allied to each other, that

they cannot exist in separation, and that he here places them in the very order in which they are received and exercised, and as so many steps in the Divine life. First, a man is enlightened to perceive, and awakened to feel his spiritual poverty his want of true wisdom and holiness, of strength to do the will of God, his frailty and mortality: and, consequently, thinks meanly of himself, and is contented with his lot. Secondly, He mourns for his sins, and those of other men, and becomes steadily and habitually serious watchful, and circumspect. Thirdly, he acquires a mild, gentle, long-suffering, and forgiving disposition; he is slow to anger, and averse to wrath; he is not easily provoked; and when his temper is ruffled, it is soon pacified again; he is not resentful, but overcomes evil with good: by the affability, courteousness, and kindness of his manners, endeavouring to reconcile such as may be offended, and win them over to peace and love.—Fourthly, instead of desiring the possessions of others, and using unlawful means to obtain them, instead of coveting the wealth and honours of the world, he sincerely, earnestly, and perseveringly desires universal holiness of heart and life, or a deliverance from all sinful dispositions and practices, and a complete restoration to the image of God in which he was originally formed. He “hungers and thirsts after righteousness,” to be imputed to him, implanted in him, and practised by him. But he knows he would do this in vain, if he did not bring forth fruits meet for repentance; that if he did not “forgive men their trespasses,” neither would his heavenly Father forgive his trespasses; (Matt. vi. 15;) that he must also be merciful after his power. (Luke iii. 8, 11.) Having found mercy with God, and being

pardoned and renewed by his Spirit, partly out of gratitude and love to God for his salvation, and partly in consequence of the change wrought in his nature, for he is "created unto good works," the tree being good, the fruit being also good, he becomes merciful in all the respects above explained, and is a partaker of the blessedness spoken of in these words.

But let us inquire,

II. WHAT IS THAT BLESSEDNESS.

Our Lord says, "He shall obtain mercy;" namely, from God and from man, and he knows he has need of both.

He knows he has sinned in time past, in thought, word, and deed, and that his sins are many, great, and aggravated; that he is involved in guilt, condemnation, and wrath; that if he die in this state, (and he may die to-morrow,) he is lost for ever. Hence, above all things, he desires pardoning mercy. Now, being convinced of sin, and made "poor in spirit," a "mourner" on account of his spiritual condition, of a "meek" and lowly mind, being made to "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and being brought to "forgive others their trespasses," his heavenly Father will forgive him. (Matt. vi. 14.) Bringing forth fruit meet for repentance, and showing mercy to his fellow-creatures, undoubtedly God will show mercy to him. "He will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him." (Isai. lv. 7)—But when shall he thus obtain mercy? When he flees to Christ for refuge, when he comes to him "weary and heavy laden;" (Matt. xi. 28;) beholds the Lamb of God; (John i. 36;) believes on Christ;

(Acts xiii 39; Gal. ii. 16.)—He now tastes the “blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity;” (Psal. xxxii. 2;) he has peace with God, and peace in his own mind; (Rom. v. 1;) he is a child of God; (John i. 12; Gal. iii. 26;) he has the spirit of adoption; (Rom. viii. 14—16; Gal. iv. 5, 6;) he has a lively and joyful hope of eternal life. (Rom. v. 2; 1 Pet i. 3.)

He knows his nature is depraved; that his heart is naturally “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;” that while in this state he can neither glorify God on earth, nor enjoy him in heaven. He sees his need of the mercy spoken of, in Tit. iii. 5. He “hungereth and thirsteth after righteousness,” resists the evil propensities of his nature, and, by believing in Christ, obtains renewing mercy.

He knows himself ignorant of many things, and liable to err; that he is compassed about with infirmity, and that he has continual need of the Divine pity, compassion, and long suffering. This he shall obtain; for “with the merciful, God will show himself merciful.” (Psalm xviii 25.)

He knows that he is needy in a thousand respects, temporal and spiritual, and ever requires Divine help and support, and he will obtain it. (Phil. iv. 19; Heb. xiii. 5, 6.)

Again: He shall obtain mercy from men; forgiveness, compassion, sympathy, relief, comfort, protection, as his varying condition may require. The Providence of God will take care of this. For “with what measure we meet, it shall be measured to us again.” (Matt. vii. 2.)

He shall especially obtain mercy; compassion, affording him consolation and succour in his sickness and all his troubles, and at a dying hour, and that both from God and man. He had personally, or by his substitutes, visited and relieved the sick and needy; therefore, he shall in turn be relieved and visited. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble." (Psalm xli. 1.)

Above all, he shall obtain mercy of the Lord in that great and decisive day. For as "he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy;" (James ii. 13;) so, he that hath showed mercy shall obtain mercy. (See 2 Tim. i. 16—18; Heb. vi. 10; and especially, Matt. xxv. 34—36;) and others shall not obtain it, whatever profession they may have made. (Matt. vii. 21—23, 26; xxv. 41—46.)

No wonder, then, that I may speak of,

III. THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO BE MERCIFUL.

Urged as we are by—

The express and repeated commands of God. (Mic. vi. 8; Luke vi. 36; Gal. vi. 2; Eph. iv. 32; 1 Pet. iii. 8.)

The example of God the Father, "the Father of mercies;" who is "rich in mercy," whose "mercies are over all his works," who is "full of compassion."—

We are mean creatures, infinitely beneath his notice;—unworthy creatures, having nothing to recommend us to him, unless our want and misery;—guilty creatures, even enemies and rebels.—Yet we experience innumerable daily and hourly blessings from God,—blessings of his providence, and blessings of redemption.

“He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,” and “with him,” and through him, we are encouraged to expect “all things” that are needful, and conducive to our welfare in time and eternity. His mercy, therefore, is disinterested and free. Such should ours be also. (Matt. v. 44, 45; Luke vi. 27—36; Eph. iv. 32.)

By the example of Christ in the days of his flesh. It was not our merit, but our misery, that induced him to assume our nature live and die for us. How compassionate was he towards those that were “as sheep without a shepherd.” Witness his unwearied endeavours to instruct them, travelling from city to city, and village to village; his grief for the hardness of their hearts, who opposed his doctrine, and his weeping over Jerusalem. (Luke xix. 4, 42.—How did he sympathize with mankind in their bodily wants and miseries! He compassionated the multitude because they had nothing to eat; Matt. xiv. 19; he healed the sick; (Matt. xiv. 14;) he cured the blind; (xx. 34;) restored to life the son of the widow of Nain; (Luke vii. 12—15;) wept with the friends of Lazarus. (John xii. 35, 38.)—How ready was he to perform kind offices to all sorts of people, good or bad! His very enemies felt the benefit of his miraculous power. Thus he healed the ear of the High Priest’s servant, who came to apprehend him. (Luke xxii. 51.)—He did not always wait till he was desired and solicited, but often surprised a miserable object with his help. We may instance the man at the pool of Bethesda. (John v. 5—9.)—His tenderness, compassion, and benignity, is not lessened now he is in heaven. (Heb. iv. 15.) Our infirmities are still known to him, and still move his regard, and he still

says to us, as he did to Paul, (2 Cor. xii. 9,) "My grace is sufficient for thee." And on the ground of the discoveries of his Gospel, "we look for his mercy unto eternal life." (Jude 21.)

APPLICATION.

And now, my Brethren, let me observe,—If the Gospel lays us under so many and strong obligations to mercy, where shall the unfeeling, unkind, and cruel appear? If compassion, mercy, forgiveness of injuries, a kind and beneficent conduct towards all, be necessary to a well-grounded hope of God's favour, what must become of those who are insensible of the calamities of others, unmoved by their cries, and inexorable to their entreaties? What must become of the spiteful and malicious, of the injurious oppressor, who sees the anguish of his brother's soul when he beseeches him, but will not hear? What must be the end of the bloody persecutor?—Let us then, as the "elect" of God, as his "peculiar people," put on "bowels of mercy." Shall others, who make no pretence to serious religion, be induced, by a goodness of nature, or by some ignoble motive, to show mercy, in so many amiable instances, and shall we, who profess godliness, come behind them? We, who acknowledge that we need so much mercy from God, have received such rich fruits of his mercy, and build all our future expectations on this foundation? We, who are not encouraged to hope for Divine mercy, without exercising it towards our fellow creatures? Who are called the followers of Jesus, the tender-hearted, the compassionate and kind Jesus, who gave

not a little of his superfluous raiment, or food, or a little money, which he could well spare, but his whole time, his talents, his life, his blood, his body, his soul, and that for transgressors and enemies? Certainly, many of the heathen world will rise up in judgment against those pretended Christians, who shut up the bowels of their compassion against the poor and destitute. — —

LXI.

CHRISTIANS THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

MATTHEW v. 13.

We are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

THESE words, with the rest of the admirable discourse in which they are contained, were addressed by our Lord, not merely to the Apostles, as some have supposed, although they were especially concerned in them, but to the whole multitude; at least to as many as desired to be his disciples, or to learn of him. (Ver. 1; see also Luke xiv. 25.) And they were intended for true Christians in general, who are elsewhere represented as the lights of the world, (Phil. ii. 15; 1 Thess. v. 5,) and whose character in the holy dispositions

and tempers most necessary to it, is admirably drawn in the preceding verses. (See ver. 3—11.

Consider,

I. THE REASON OF THIS FIGURE BY WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE STYLED “THE SALT OF THE EARTH;” AND IN WHAT SENSE THEY ARE SO.

Salt has been considered in different ages and nations as an emblem of knowledge and wisdom. Thus a great Roman historian, Livy, terms Greece, *sal Gentium*, “the salt of the nations,” on account of these intellectual improvements which many other nations derived from that country. And St. Paul speaks of it as an emblem of grace. (Col. iv. 6.) True Christians, therefore, are termed, “the salt of the earth,” because they are instruments of communicating Divine knowledge and heavenly wisdom to mankind, and through them also God communicates his grace. But it is evident, they cannot season others with this salt, unless they have and keep it themselves. Indeed, without this they are not Christians, not the disciples of Christ. They are not “salt,” though they may be *salt-ashes*, used in manuring the ground, to which a celebrated commentator has strangely supposed our Lord here intended to compare his disciples. To render them properly speaking, “the salt of the earth,” they must “have salt in themselves,” as our Lord said, (Mark ix. 50,) who also observed, “every sacrifice shall be salted with salt;” alluding to that part of the law of Moses which required every meat-offering, or sacrifice, to be seasoned with salt. (See Lev. ii. 13; and compare Mark ix.

50.) For every one who offers himself to God, in true repentance, faith and new obedience, as a “living sacrifice,” shall be seasoned with the grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby the soul is quickened, enlightened, purified, and preserved, for the future incorruptible inheritance *

The properties of salt are to prevent, or remedy, corruption. And Christians must have in themselves the salt of knowledge and wisdom, that they may be preserved from, or cured of those corrupt principles which deprave, debase, weaken, and destroy the powers of the soul, and fill it with disorders and death; which tend to blind the mind and corrupt the heart; to darken the understanding, deceive the judgment, mislead or stupify the conscience; to pervert the choice, and purpose of the will; to pollute, debauch, and sensualize, the affections; and inflame and disorder all the passions.—It is needless to particularize these principles. They are those of infidelity, heresy, and licentiousness; of Atheism, Deism, Sadduceism, Pharisaism, Antinomianism, libertinism, and sensuality; or, in one word, of Antichristianism; all that is opposed to what St. Paul calls “sound doctrine,” and which sound doctrine is calculated to prevent or cure. This salt, then, must be in us; we must understand, believe, consider, lay to heart,

* The passage, in this connection, in the Gospel of St. Mark, has a primary reference to the advice which had been before given by our Lord, to cut off the offending member, and implies, that all, who, by disregarding that advice, should become sacrifices to Divine justice, “would be seasoned with fire itself, so as to become inconsumable,” and endure for ever to be tormented, and, therefore, may be said to be *‘salted with fire.’*” See the Author’s Commentary, where he quotes Whitby on this text. E.

and be influenced by this doctrine, and that we may be secured against, and preserved from, or cured of all corrupt and destructive principles.—The salt of saving grace must be in us, as an antidote against the corruption that prevails in the heart, against debasing desires and designs, the sordid and evil inclinations, affections, passions, tempers, which lodge therein. Grace must quicken, convert, regenerate, renew, sanctify, and communicate a Divine nature. And we must have this salt in us, to prevent the growth of, nay, and to cure this our radical corruption of nature.—By these means, *viz:* the salt of christian wisdom and knowledge, and christian grace, we are delivered from all corrupt practices to which we might have been accustomed, or in which we might have been entangled, and are preserved from the same in future. — —

Salt renders that savoury which was before insipid and tasteless.—Thus christian knowledge, wisdom, and grace, renders a man's spirit, conversation, and example, instructive and edifying to all around him. (Cor. iv. 6; Eph. iv. 29.)—This salt seasons and renders pleasing and agreeable to God, the sacrifices whether of our persons, or prayers, or praises; of our preaching, hearing, reading, meditating; of all religious, moral, and even civil duties and works. “Every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.” (Lev. ii. 13.) For divine knowledge, wisdom, and grace, should season every act of piety, obedience, and charity, we perform; otherwise they cannot be acceptable to God, or lastingly useful to ourselves or others.

Salt again contracts and binds together the fibres of the flesh on which it is sprinkled and rubbed, and, therefore, was used by our Lord as an emblem of peace and friendship. (Mark ix. 50.) And, so considered, it might be the reason of that figure whereby a perpetual engagement is called “a covenant of salt.” (Num. xviii. 19.) Thus the salt of heavenly wisdom and grace will be within us a principle of peace, love, and union, joining us to God in Christ and to one another, in the mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ, in constant friendship and affection. — —

Hence we see how Christians are qualified to be the salt of the earth; and it will now be easy to understand in what sense they are so. For we have only to observe that they are used by God as instruments of communicating that salt to others, which has been first communicated to themselves, and thereby of seasoning them with knowledge, wisdom, and grace.—Thus, they are the means of preventing or curing men’s corrupt, unscriptural, and antichristian principles, and bringing them to the knowledge of “the truth as it is in Jesus;” of the doctrines, privileges, and duties of Christianity; which is of unspeakable importance in order to their salvation. (John viii. 31, 32; James i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 22; 2 Thess. ii. 10, 12; 1 Tim. ii. 4; vi. 5.)—They are instrumental in converting, regenerating, or renewing mankind; of making them new creatures; “so that old things pass away, and all things become new.” (2 Cor. v. 17.) Hereby the consciences of men are informed; awakened, sprinkled from guilt, freed from condemnation; their wills are subdued and conformed to the will of God, and their choice, intentions, and determinations, are changed, and all their passions regulated and

sanctified.—Thus Christians, by their conversation and example, their instructions and influence, their spirit and conduct, not only produce a reformation in the corrupt manners and practices of men, but, in countless instances, abolish them. For they are “created unto good works.” (Eph. ii. 10.) The tree being good, the fruit is good; which is “all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” (Eph. v. 9.) And “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. (Tit. ii. 11, 12.)—By diffusing divine knowledge, wisdom, and grace, they cure the natural ignorance and folly of men, respecting spiritual and divine things: the insipidity, tastelessness, and perniciousness of their habitual conversation, and render it edifying.—Farther; they promote peace and love, and attach and bind men to God and one another, by the best of bonds.—

II. THE DANGER LEST THIS SALT SHOULD LOSE ITS SAVOUR, AND, IN THAT CASE, THE DIFFICULTY OF RESTORING IT.

St. Mark’s expression is, *αναλον γενηται*, *should become insipid*; rendered by our translators, “If the salt have lost his saltness.” Some have thought that salt can never lose its saltness, and that our Lord is here making a supposition, which can never be verified in fact. How far salt made of sea-water may lose its saltness, I am not prepared to say. But our Lord’s supposition here is admirably confirmed and illustrated by MR. MAUNDRELL, who tells us that in the Valley

of Salt, near Gebul, and about four hours journey from Aleppo, there is a small precipice, occasioned by the continual taking away of the salt. "In this," says he, "you may see how the veins of it lie. I broke a piece off it, of which the part exposed to the rain, and sun, and air, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, yet it had perfectly lost its savour. The innermost part, which had been connected to the rock, retained its savour, as I found by proof."*

Thus, by intercourse with the world, by breathing, so to speak, the air of it, or drinking into its spirit; by being exposed to the rain of adversity and trouble; or by being shone upon and warmed by the sun of prosperity, those that should be the salt of the earth may lose the spirit of true religion, which is their seasoning virtue, and may become insipid, deriving no benefit to themselves from the doctrine of CHRIST, and conveying none to others.

Those, however, who continue to be connected with, and united to the Rock, the LORD JESUS, retain their savour. And in order that his followers might do this, our LORD, in the passage connected with the words in Mark, exhorts them to cut off those members that offend, to separate themselves from every ensnaring object, and to mortify every unholy affection and passion. Without doing this they could neither continue to be the salt of the earth, nor to have the high honour of seasoning mankind with knowledge and grace, nor indeed retain in themselves that salt of divine grace, by which they can alone escape the fire "that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not."

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* Travels in the Holy Land, last page, 5th Edition.

St. Matthew and St. Luke do not use the word *αναλον*, “insipid,” or “having lost its saltiness,” but *μωρανθη*, which has a peculiar strength and beauty, and is literally, *If it be infatuated, or grown foolish*. And, surely, infatuated they are, who are willing to lose their knowledge and wisdom in the things of God and his grace; their inclination and ability to do good to others; and their own everlasting salvation.

“Wherewith shall it be salted?”—If you who have salt in yourselves, and whose office it is to season others, should lose your grace and religion, wherewith can you be again seasoned? What can recover those whom my Gospel and grace do not reclaim? Or, what, can restore you, if you be corrupted, who should be the means of curing and restoring others? Is there any other truth, or grace, or knowledge, or wisdom, or means whatsoever, that can be called in, or used for the restoration of the saltiness, or seasoning power of those who have cast away the influence of the doctrine and Spirit of Christ, and the grace and religion thereby received? (See Heb. vi. 4; x. 26—29.)

III. THE WORTHLESSNESS AND CONTEMPTIBLENESS OF IT, IF NOT RESTORED.

“It is thenceforth good for nothing,” says our Lord according to St. Matthew. It is useless and contemptible. “It is neither fit for the land,” says he, according to St. Luke, (ch. xiv. 35,) “nor yet for the dunghill;” it cannot be used for manure of itself to enrich the ground, nor be thrown on the dunghill, to be mixed with other manure. A professor of religion, whose mind and manners are depraved, is the most

insipid and useless creature that exists; he is useless, nay, hurtful, not only in religious society, but in the world at large. As some things will spoil even dung-hills, so fallen professors are stumbling blocks, in the way of those who might otherwise "repent and turn to God;" they render carnal and wicked men worse than they were before, by prejudicing and hardening them against the ways and truth of God, and confirming them in their unbelief and sin. Thus, useless, contemptible, and hurtful, do even those disciples become, who are placed in the most eminent stations, when they evidently show that they have lost their wisdom, and grace, and all true and vital religion. Such persons should be cast out of the church, not only because they have forfeited all the honours and privileges of their membership, but because there is a danger lest others should be infected by them. If they do not gradually withdraw of themselves, and leave the faithful, those that watch over the flock should have power to exclude them. However, God, in his providence, after he has sufficiently exercised his long-suffering towards them, will cut them off. (John xv. 1, 6.) St. Luke adds, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

LXII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS SUPERIOR TO THAT OF THE PHARISEES.

MATTHEW V. 20.

I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A most surprising and alarming declaration this indeed! and it will appear more so, the better it is understood, and the more it is considered by whom it was uttered. The more perfectly we are informed what was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and in what instances ours must exceed theirs, in order to our entering into the kingdom of heaven, and the more we reflect that he who declared this was a teacher sent from God, possessed of credentials such as none besides ever had, was the wisdom of God incarnate, "the Word made flesh," "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness," whose every word is firmer than the pillars of heaven, and must judge us at the last day; the more, I say, we know and consider these things, the more must we be astonished to hear that, "Except our righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

It is hardly necessary to say, that although these two names, *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, generally occur together in the Scriptures, yet they, by no means, sig-

nify the same thing, or always describe the same persons. The former is a name of *office*; the Scribes being, properly, the learned among the Jews, and the authorized and accustomed teachers of the people. They had their name from their employment, it being a principal part of their office to transcribe the Holy Scriptures, and to write out fair copies of the Law and the Prophets, and other parts of the Old Testament. This they did with great exactness, counting not only the chapters and verses, but the words and letters in each book, and observing how often each letter of the alphabet occurred in it. Nay, they went so far as to mark what letter was to be written large, and what small, in any book or chapter, and laid particular stress in doing this exactly according to their copy. Most of them, it seems, were of the sect of the Pharisees, although some, no doubt, were of that of the Sadducees, or even of the Essenes.

The Pharisees were the largest and most ancient of these three sects, into which the Jews were at that time divided. They are said to have made their first appearance about 150 years before Christ; and took their name from a Hebrew word that signifies *to separate*; because they seemed to separate themselves from all others, by their peculiar manner of living. They acknowledged the existence of angels, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state of rewards and punishments; and in these, as well as in various other things, differed from the Sadducees, who were a kind of infidels, or free thinkers. (Acts xxiii. 8) Again, the Pharisees professed a greater knowledge than others of the rites of the Jewish worship, and of the customs of their country,

and were very strict in the observance of them, as also of all the traditions of the elders. They fasted often, made long prayers, rigorously kept the Sabbath, paid all tithes, even those of mint, anise, and cummin, and put on an appearance of great sanctity, with much display of zeal for Moses and the law. In short, as the Scribes were the teachers of the law, so the Pharisees were the professors of it; and they were both in such reputation among the people, that it is said to have been a proverb which then prevailed, "If but two men were to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one of them would be a Pharisee, and the other a Scribe." How greatly, therefore, must it have astonished, if not exasperated them, to hear our Lord declare that "except their righteousness exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should, in no case, enter into the kingdom of heaven!" They knew not his divine character, and, it is possible, many of them judged him a false prophet and a deceiver, and, consequently, they might less venturously despise his declaration. But we who know that when "heaven and earth shall pass away, his word shall not pass away," can no more slight or disregard his declaration, than we can reject or disbelieve his doctrine, especially a declaration so clear, so express, and so awful as this, and delivered on such a solemn occasion.

But that we may not only be alarmed and awakened, but also and especially instructed and directed by it, let us consider more particularly,

I. WHAT WAS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

In general, we may remark, they were strict in observing the precepts of the law, in outward things, both moral and ceremonial, and even the unwritten traditions of the elders, and the customs of their country; they were frequent in prayer and fasting, and other acts of external devotion; they were also abundant in alms giving.

To be more particular. Let us observe the account which one of them gives of himself before God in secret, in which we may reasonably believe he was sincere, and describes the character of the generality of his brethren, as well as his own. See Luke xviii. 11, 12.

He was singular, "not as other men;" not as the generality of his countrymen. He was free from gross and scandalous sins: he was not an "extortioner," not an usurer, nor an oppressor to his debtors or tenants, but equitable and kind to all dependant upon him; and not rapacious, seizing other men's property under false pretences. He was not "unjust," in any of his dealings, did no wrong to any man; did not take advantage of any man's ignorance, want of experience, or necessity in buying or selling. He was not an "adulterer," but had possessed his vessel in sanctification and honour. He attended punctually the ordinances of God, and used all the means of grace, and not only those that were most commonly observed, as reading and meditating on the law, and prayer, in which, it is evident, he was long and frequent; but even fasting. Yea, he "fasted twice in the week,"

and that partly as a means of mortification, partly as an act of temperance and self-denial, and partly as a help to devotion. The Pharisees and their disciples were wont to keep two private fasts every week, *viz.* on Mondays and Thursdays, as the primitive Christians did on Wednesdays and Fridays. Thus, we may say, he glorified God with his body. Yet this was not all, for "he gave tithes of all that he possessed," according to the law, and so glorified God with his property. Many of the Pharisees were accustomed to give one full tenth of their income to the house and worship of God, and another tenth in alms to the poor. The sum of this plea of the Pharisee is, "I do no harm; I use all the means of grace; and I do all the good in my power."—This was his righteousness, and of this righteousness he gives God the glory, at least, in appearance, ascribing it not to himself, but to God, for he says, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

II. IN WHAT RESPECTS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST EXCEED THEIRS.

It must exceed,—

In the SPIRITUALITY of it. Their righteousness consisted chiefly in the letter; ours must be principally in the spirit. This observation may be illustrated by a reference to their righteousness in several respects.—To their obedience to the divine commands, especially the three first, the sixth, and seventh, which they interpreted barely of the outward act. Of two of the commandments our Lord has given us the true interpretation in this chapter. (ver. 21, 22, and 27, 28.)—To

their deeds of charity. It is not enough that we do them; but we must consider from what principle, and in what spirit they are performed.—To their act of worship. The chief point is not that we worship so often, or for such a time, but that we “worship in spirit and in truth;” not how frequently or how long we pray, but whether we pray with sincerity, fervency, importunity, confidence, expectation. Like remarks may be made on the worship of God in praise, on hearing or reading his word, on communicating in the ordinances and religious fastings; in all of which we may observe a “form of godliness,” while we are destitute of “the power thereof.”

In the **EXTENT** of it. Their righteousness was partial; ours must be universal. They “tithed mint, anise, and cummin,” but neglected “judgment, mercy, and faith.” (Matt. xxiii. 23; Luke xi. 42.) We must “have respect to all God’s commandments,” as explained and vindicated by our Lord from the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. — — [Read Matt. v. 17—19, 33—37—38—42, 43—48.]

In the **MOTIVE** of it. Their righteousness proceeded from some selfish principle, as from a regard to the censures or praises of man, or the fear of hell, or, at best, from the hope of heaven. Ours must spring from love to God in consequence of his love to us, and from love to mankind. — —

In the **END** of it. They had wealth, or, at least, honour in view. They did “all their works to be seen of men.” (Matt. xxiii. 5.) Our end must be the glory of God. (1 Cor. vi. 20; x. 31.) — —

In the **RULE** of it. Their rule was custom, or the traditions of the elders, or their own will and fancy, or

the mere letter of the law. Ours must be the will and word of God, considered and understood according to the spirituality, extent, and obligation of it; and we must obey out of conscience towards God. — —

In the SPIRIT and MANNER of it. Their righteousness was exercised in a spirit of pride, self-will, impatience, and rash, fiery, persecuting zeal. (Rom. x. 2.) Ours must be practised in a spirit of humility, resignation, patience, meekness, kindness, and purity. — —

In the WHOLE NATURE and ORIGIN of it. Their righteousness was *legal*, wrought out by the strength of nature, in obedience to an outward law; and implied neither pardon, nor regeneration, nor “grace to help in time of need.” Ours must be *evangelical*, and must imply righteousness imputed, or sin not imputed; righteousness implanted, or a new birth; and practical obedience flowing therefrom, and accepted through Christ. Theirs was of the law; (Rom. ix. 30—32;) ours must be of faith. Theirs was of man; ours must be of God, who not only requires and bestows, but approves it. — —

We will show,

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THIS SUPERIORITY.

Without this, we *cannot* enter into the kingdom of heaven; we shall want the proper title to it, and fitness for it. — —

Without this, we *shall not* enter into it. For he who pronounces our exclusion. “openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.” (Rev. iii. 7.) —

Without this, we shall *in no case* enter into it; not in case of knowledge, or orthodoxy, or scriptural and rational modes of worship, or an unblameable conduct, or

numerous deeds of charity or connection with a pure church, or holy people. For, after all this, the assertion still returns, “Except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall *in no case* enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Reflect upon the certainty of this: “I say unto you.” Consider the knowledge, the veracity, the power, the holiness, the justice, and the wrath, even of him who utters these words, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his words shall not pass away.” (Matt. xxiv. 35.)

LXIII.

ON FASTING.

MATTHEW VI. 16.*

When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

THE ends proposed by our Government in the appointment of this day, as a General Fast, are great and important; and probably, there are none present on this occasion who are disposed to question the wisdom and propriety of such an appointment, for the attainment of such ends; or who suppose that our Government is not supported by Scripture, in enjoining the use of these means of averting calamities and obtaining bless-

* Preached on occasion of a National Fast.

ings. You are too well acquainted with the oracles of God, to entertain such a sentiment. Nevertheless, you will generally agree with me, that the bare using these means, the bare observing, or professing to observe, a day, as a day of fasting and humiliation, will not answer the ends, or be of any real use, unless it be regarded, as the proclamation directs, in "a devout and solemn," and, I may add, consistent manner. Without this, by the observance of the day, we only add to the already too heavy load of national guilt that lies upon us, and bring a curse upon ourselves and our country, instead of a blessing. Lest this should be the case with any of us,—reflect we on the comprehensive direction here given by our Lord. "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward."

You will recollect these words are taken from our Lord's admirable discourse delivered on the Mount. That discourse, as has been observed by an eminent Divine, consists of three principal branches. In the first, contained in the fifth chapter, the sum of all true religion is laid down in eight particulars, which are explained, and guarded against the false glosses of men. In the second, contained in the sixth chapter, we are directed concerning the means of religion, and that right intention we should preserve in all our actions, unmixed with worldly desires, or anxious cares, even for the necessities of this life. In the third, contained in the seventh chapter, we are cautioned against the grand hinderances of religion, and particularly against unbelief and discouragement in prayer, closed with an exhortation to fulfil all the will of God, and a

solemn application of the whole discourse to the conscience of every hearer. It is the second of these branches of his discourse that our Lord has under consideration in this paragraph. He is here directing us respecting the means of religion, and that purity of intention, without which no outward actions can please God. He speaks first of *alms-giving*, or more generally “of the practice of righteousness:”* (ver. 1—4;) secondly, of *prayer*; (ver. 5—15;) and then of *fasting*, in the paragraph from which the text is taken. —

Consider we,

I. THE NATURE, DESIGN, AND IMPORTANCE, OF FASTING.

As to the NATURE of fasting, little need be said; nor would it be necessary at all to advert to this part of the subject, did we not occasionally meet with persons who absurdly suppose that all that is meant by fasting is, to abstain from sin. — We must fast from sin undoubtedly; for, without this all is to no purpose. This, however, is not what is meant by fasting; but to abstain from food for a time longer or shorter, as health and duty will allow. To prove what is so clear, by citing numerous passages from the historical books of the Old Testament, and from the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles, would be lost labour. Moses, Elijah, and our Lord, being miraculously supported, abstained from all food for forty days. The Jews, in Esther’s

* Some copies of the original text, and very ancient versions read, *δικαιοσύνην*, “righteousness,” instead of *ἐλεημοσύνην*, “alms-deeds,” and several of the Fathers quote the passage so. See the Author’s Commentary on ver. 1, and Dr. Doddridge.

time, fasted for three days; (Esth. iv. 16;) Cornelius for three or four days. (Acts x. 30.) But the time of fasting more frequently mentioned in Scripture, is one day, from morning till evening. This was the fast commonly observed among the ancient Christians. They had also their half fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, on which days they took no sustenance till three o'clock in the afternoon, the time when they returned from public service.

When, through sickness or bodily weakness, we cannot fast entirely, a partial abstinence may be used. We may take a lesser quantity of food than usual, and eat "no pleasant bread." We have instances of this in the Scripture. (See Dan x. 2, 3.) Hence the very ancient custom of abstaining from flesh and wine, during the times set apart for fasting and abstinence.

Among the Jews other circumstances were usually added, which, however, had no necessary connection with fasting, such as the neglect of their apparel, the laying aside their accustomed ornaments, the putting on mourning, the strewing ashes on their head, or wearing sackcloth next their skin. These things were, doubtless, unnecessary, and our Lord seems here to condemn them, at least, in private fasting, to which his directions principally refer. Two other things, however, according to the Scripture, should be joined with fasting,—the abstaining from all carnal indulgences, and such gratifications of sense as might be innocently used at another time, and an intermission of worldly employments and pursuits. (See Isai. lviii. 3.)

But what is the *DESIGN* of fasting? What end should we have in view therein?—One end of fasting is to manifest and promote inward sorrow for sin; (Isai.

lviii. 5;) hatred to it, and immediate purpose to forsake it. Indeed, distress of soul on account of sin, or its punishment, or on any other account, will naturally lead us to abstain from food. In such a condition of soul, people will have little regard even for their sustenance, much less for any delicacy or necessary variety of food. An instance of this we have in Saul, who, in his distress because of Samuel, "had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night;" (1 Sam. xxviii. 15—20;) in those in the ship with Paul; (Acts xxvii. 33;) in Paul himself, while he continued without sight at Damascus; (Acts ix. 9;) and in David, when he mourned the death of Saul and Jonathan. (2 Sam. i. 12.)

"When good men feel in themselves the heavy burden of sin, see damnation to be the reward of it, and behold with the eye of their mind the horror of hell, they tremble, they quake, and are inwardly touched with sorrowfulness of heart for their offences, and cannot but accuse themselves, and open this their grief unto Almighty God, and call unto him for mercy. This being done seriously, their mind is so occupied, partly with sorrow and heaviness, partly with an earnest desire to be delivered from this danger of damnation, that all desire of meat and drink is laid apart, and loathsomeness of all wordly things, and pleasure, cometh in place; so that nothing then liketh them more, than to weep, to lament, to mourn, and both with words and behaviour of body, to show themselves weary of this life."*

By means of abstinence, godly sorrow and hatred to sin may be increased as well as manifested. For, as

* First Part of the Homily on Fasting.

fulness of bread, and indulging our appetites, tend to produce levity and thoughtlessness of mind, carelessness and stupidity of spirit, so fasting and denial of the appetite tend to produce reflection, seriousness, concern about salvation, and a deep sense of the certainty and importance of spiritual and eternal things.

A second end of fasting is, that we may use one, although a small instance of self-denial, and a means of mortification.—Perhaps we have abused these lawful and needful things, meat and drink, those good gifts of God. It is then reasonable and proper we should herein deny ourselves, and, with David, “chasten our souls with fasting;” (Psal lxi; 10;) taking “revenge,” as St. Paul speaks, upon ourselves. (2 Cor. vii. 11.)—Fulness of bread increases, not only levity, carelessness, and stupidity, but also foolish and unholy desires, yea, unclean and vile affections. By fasting, we withdraw fuel from our lusts, and mortify our appetites and passions.

A third important end of fasting is, that it may be a help to prayer and other holy duties. This it especially is, when during our fast we set apart large portions of time for prayer, reading, and meditation, both in private and public. When the stomach is empty, the understanding is most clear, the passions most calm and peaceful, and the mind and heart best prepared for holy thoughts, desires, hopes, joys, for prayer and praise, and every part of worship; then we discern most clearly, and feel most deeply, spiritual and eternal things, and are most sensible of, and affected with, the nature and importance of our duty in all respects.

These things sufficiently manifest the *reasonableness* and IMPORTANCE of fasting. It is highly reasonable we should from time to time thus express our sorrow for sin, and use this means to have it increased; that we should thus deny ourselves, and endeavour to mortify our lusts and passions; that we should use this help to prayer and devotion. This will more fully appear, if we consider how God has been wont to own and bless this means—To the averting of his anger, as evinced by judgments and calamities, from individuals, as in the case of Abah; (1 Kings xxi. 27—29;) from cities, as in that of Nineveh; (Jon. iii. 4—10;) from a people, as in the case of the Jews, in consequence of Jehoshaphat's proclamation of a fast; (2 Chron. xx. 1—30;) and of Daniel's fasting and praying. (ch. ix. 3—ult.)—To the obtaining blessings for individuals, as in the case of Esther; (ch. iv. 16;) Cornelius; (Acts x. 30;) Paul and Barnabas; (Acts xiii. 3; xiv. 2;) for a people, as for the children of Israel. (Judg. xx. 26; 1 Sam. vii. 6; Ezra viii. 21, 23; Neh. i. 4—1.)—It was expressly enjoined by God for these ends; to avert calamities and obtain blessings, even for whole nations; (Joel ii. 12, 14;) and spiritual as well as temporal blessings are thus obtained (Joel ii. 28.)

- These considerations make it evident that fasting is an important ordinance of God, and a means of grace, and, therefore, ought not to be treated with that neglect, much less with that contempt and ridicule wherewith many, even professors, seem disposed to treat it in our own day. But, perhaps, one reason of the slight that is cast upon this ordinance by some more serious and considerate men, may be their observing

the hypocritical and inconsistent conduct of many, who are advocates for, and profess to observe it.

This leads me,

II. TO SHOW HOW THE HYPOCRITES FAST.

They are very partial in their fasting.—They do not, strictly speaking, fast at all; though they would appear to do it; they do not abstain from food, perhaps of one meal, or even from any usual kind of food, or in any degree.—They do not desist from sensual pleasures or gratifications. As the Prophet said of the Jews, (Isai. lviii. 3,) “In the day of their fast they find pleasure.”—They do not cease from their worldly cares and employments. As the Prophet adds, “they exact all their labours.” Thus do many at this day.

They are insincere in their fasting. They, in effect, profess to have sorrow for sin, both their own, and that of the nation, and, as to themselves, to be resolved to forsake it. But there is no sincerity in this; it is all mere profession. (Isai. i. 11—15; Jer. viii. 6.)

They are not simple in heart, but selfish. Instead of having a single eye to the mortification of sin, and the glory of God, in their fasting, they have in view their own honour, or interest, or to atone for their sins, and, as it were, bribe God to be gracious to them, and by doing one duty they hope to compensate for the neglect of others. Thus in Isai. lviii. 3, “Wherefore have we fasted,” say they, “and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?” It is for this cause the exhortation is given in the verses following our text: “Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret." (Ver. 17, 18.) Sometimes indeed, it seems the hypocrites intend the gratification of an unholy passion, as pride, wrath, or revenge: "Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness." (Isai. lviii. 4.) Or they intend the attaining an unlawful object. (Jam. iv. 1—3.)

They are not self-abased and humble in their fasting, but self righteous and self-confident, resting in the external work, and depending on it, although not done aright, to recommend them to God. (Jer. viii. 12.)

They are not internal and spiritual, but merely external and formal agents in all the duties of the day. (Isai. lxvi. 3, 4.)

They are not consistent, but return to the commission of those very sins to-morrow for which they professed to fast, and mourn, and earnestly to ask pardon to-day. (Isai. lviii. 1, 2; lix. 1, 2.)

They do not imitate that mercy of God, which they profess to entreat; but withhold charity from the poor.

And how much reason is there to think, that thousands among us fast as do the hypocrites in all these particulars! Have not many of you, my hearers, fasted, (if you can be said to have fasted,) in this hypocritical manner, on such days as the present, if not on this day? But can we hope by such fasts to avert God's wrath, or obtain blessings for ourselves and our country? Surely it is vain to expect it. Consider, therefore,

III. HOW THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD, WHO WORSHIP HIM IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH, OBSERVE THIS DUTY.

They observe, as far as their health and strength will allow, every part of a fast as mentioned above.

They are sincere and deeply affected with their own sins, (Joel ii. 12—17,) and, on such an occasion as this, with the sins of their country, and the judgments of God due to it, and partly threatening us, and partly executed upon us. — (Ezek. ix. 4; Dan. ix. 3; Jam. iv. 9, 10.)

Their eye is single. They intend the glory of God. (Matt. vi. 18;) and the mortification of sin in themselves and others, and the reformation of the nation. (Rom. xiii. 14; viii. 13; Gal. v. 16—24.)

They are humble; having no confidence in this or in any other duty they perform, for justification before, or acceptance with God. Much less do they expect to merit any deliverance or blessing hereby for their country. But their dependence for these and such like things, is wholly on the mercy of God and merits of Christ.

They are internal and spiritual in this and every duty connected with it. They do not rest in the outward act; but their souls are afflicted, humbled, and distressed, and yet confide in the mercy of God in Christ; that “he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him.” (Joel ii. 14.) So in prayer, praise, hearing the word, they are internal and spiritual.

Above all, they are consistent; and having fasted, and prayed, and confessed their sins to-day, they do not return to the commission of sin to-morrow. But

they entreat of God as well power over sin, as the pardon of it for themselves and others. (Isai. i. 16; lv. 6, 7; Matt. iii. 7—10; Luke iii. 7—9; xiii. 1—9; James iv. 8.) How necessary is it to do so, at this time.— — All hopes of deliverance, and a blessing to our country without this, are vain. The only alternate afforded to us, is *reform*, or *ruin*. (2 Chron. vii. 19; Jer. xviii. 6.)

They join works of charity to works of piety, and show that mercy to others which they supplicate from the Lord for themselves and their country. (Isai. i. 17; lviii. 7; Psal. xviii. 25; Luke iii. 11.)

APPLICATION.

* * * * *

LXIV.

THE SERVICE OF GOD AND OF THE WORLD IRRECONCILEABLE.

MATTHEW VI. 24.

Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

So testified the Son of God, the Wisdom and Word of God incarnate, the Faithful and True Witness, who never bore testimony to any thing false, any thing trivial or unimportant. But, alas! who of his professed followers believes his testimony, or acts as if he believed it? Who does not conduct himself, as if he

thought he certainly could, and that with the greatest ease, serve both God and mammon? Our Lord's words, however, will be found firmer than the pillars of heaven, and according as we observe them, or not, we shall stand or fall at the great day. We must take care, therefore, that we understand them.

Our Lord having in the first part of this admirable sermon on the Mount, contained in the preceding chapter, described the nature of true holiness, inward and outward, proceeds in the second part, contained in this chapter, to show the necessity of a right intention,—in alms-giving,—in prayer, the manner, form, and pre-requisites of which he sets forth,—in fasting,—and in all our works, unalloyed either with the desire of riches, or worldly care, and the fear of want. It is this last particular that is his subject in this paragraph. Making a transition from religious to common actions, he says, (ver. 19,) “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth—;” thus warning us against the love of money, it being as inconsistent with purity of intention, as the love of praise spoken of in the three preceding verses, and guarding us against making any thing on earth our treasure, which any object may be properly said to become, when we set our affections upon it.

Then to show that the doing this proceeds from darkness of mind, or a perverted judgment, he adds, “The light,” or *lamp*, rather, as ο λυχνος should be rendered, “of the body is the eye.” It is by the eye that a person has light to direct him in his bodily motions, and in the use of his bodily members. If, therefore, “thine eye be single,” απλους, *simple*, not mixed with noxious humours, but clear and

sound, "thy whole body shall be full of light;" every member of thy body shall be enlightened with the light of thine eye, and directed to perform its proper office. "But if thine eye be evil;" Gr. *πονηρος*, rendered *νοσώδης*, *morbid*, by Theophylact, and *distempered* by Dr. Campbell; "thy whole body shall be full of darkness." If that which is the light of the body, and on which all the other members depend for light be darkened, how miserable will be the state of the body! Thus "if the conscience, or practical judgment, that mental light which God has given to man for regulating his conduct, be itself vitiated, what will be the state of his appetites and passions, which are naturally blind and precipitate. "If thy judgment be sound," says Baxter, "and thou knowest the difference between laying up treasure in heaven, and on earth, it will rightly guide all the actions of thy heart and life; but if thy judgment be blinded in this great affair, it will misguide thy love, thy choice, and all the tenor of thy life; if then, that which should guide thee be blind, what a miserable erroneous wretch wilt thou be, and how dismal will that error prove." Or, as Dr. Doddridge expresses it, "If the maxims you lay down to yourselves are wrong, how very erroneous must your conduct be!" It then follows, (ver. 24,) "No man can serve two masters," whose interests and commands are directly contrary to each other; "for either he will hate the one and love the other," and therefore, while he employs himself in the service of the one, will, of course, neglect the interest of the other; "or else he will hold to the one and despise the other;" *i. e.*, will adhere entirely to the love and service of the one, and entirely abandon the other. Do not, therefore, impose upon

yourselves so far as to imagine that your hearts can be equally divided between heaven and earth; “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”—

That we may see clearly the truth and infinite importance of our Lord’s declaration, consider we,—

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN TRULY SERVING GOD?

If no more is meant by serving God, than many, even professing Christians, seem to suppose, it is certain a man might easily serve him, and serve the world at the same time. To serve God according to their views of the subject, implies only three things; to attend the ordinances of God, especially public worship, and occasionally the Lord’s supper; to shun open sin, and support an outward unblameable conduct; and to give alms when convenient. Now, it is certain, a person might do all these things, and yet be a perfect slave to the world; a faithful and diligent servant of mammon. Such should be informed that God cannot be served acceptably unless he be *known*. Thus David observed to his son Solomon, (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) “Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind ” &c. David did not mean, know there is a God. Solomon knew this perfectly, and doubtless had known it from a child. Nor did he merely mean, know what God is; that he is a spirit, an infinite and eternal spirit, self-existent, and, therefore, independent, and supreme over all other beings, who are only the workmanship of his hands; that he is possessed of all possible perfections, of unsearchable wisdom, of almighty power, of unfathomable goodness, of invio-

lable truth, of impartial justice, of unspeakable mercy and love; that he is thy Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, to whom thou art indebted for all thy powers and faculties of body and mind; for thy "life and breath, and all things;" that he is thy Redeemer and Saviour, thy Governor and Judge. But, know him experimentally and savingly; be acquainted with him as thy God in covenant, thy Friend and Father. Know him, not merely by the teaching of man, or of his word; but by that of his Spirit. — — See Isai. liv. 13; Jer. xxiv. 7; xxxi. 34; Matt. xi. 27; 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 John v. 20. This implies that we know him,—In his glory and majesty, and have a deep sense thereof, producing seriousness, solemnity, and awe, reverence and fear, which are essential to the right service of God. (Heb. xii. 28.) Of the glory and majesty of God, see Isai. xl. 12, 15, 17, 22, 26; lvii. 15. Thus knowing him, we shall prefer him infinitely to all other beings and things, which will appear as nothing compared to him; and we shall be concerned above all things to secure his favour.—In his holiness and justice; in consideration of which we shall be deeply humbled and abased, before him, under a sense of our sinfulness, guilt and weakness, depravity and misery. This was the effect it had upon Job. (Chap. xl. 4, 5; xlii. 5, 6.) Hereby we become truly penitent, and are prepared to find mercy.—In his mercy and grace; as he proclaimed himself to Moses, (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7,) "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." See also Jer. xxxi. 34. This produces trust or confidence in him: "They that know thy name will

put their trust in thee," (Psalm ix. 10.) Thus we obtain pardon or reconciliation, essential to the right serving of him; (Heb. ix. 13, 14;) for he will not; he cannot be served by an enemy under his wrath. Our persons must be accepted before our services can be so. Hence we can also "serve him without fear." (Luke i. 74.) But by this we do not mean we can serve God without a reverential fear of him, or without filial fear of offending him; a watchful fear of our enemies, or a jealous fear of ourselves, "Lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, we should come short of it," in all which respects "blessed is the man that feareth always;" but we mean without any slavish fear of God, or that spirit of bondage, from which the spirit of adoption is given to deliver true believers; (Rom. viii. 15. Gal. 5—7; 2 Tim. i. 7;) and without any tormenting fear of death, or of any suffering antecedent to death, which we may be called to pass through, to deliver us from which fear Christ assumed our flesh and blood. (Heb. ii. 14, 15.)—In his love; not only his *loveliness*, or amiable perfections, producing a high esteem for him; but in his *loving-kindness*, producing a grateful and complacential love to him. (1 John iv. 16, 17.) Without this we do not know him, and cannot acceptably serve him. (John xiv. 15, 23, 24; 1 John iv. 7, 8.)—From this principle of love, we readily, freely, and fully yield ourselves, with all we are, and have, and can do, to his service, to promote his cause, interest, and glory, which, also, is essential to the serving him in an acceptable manner; (Rom. vi. 16;) including the surrender of all our faculties and members to him. (Rom. vi. 13; xii. 1.)

Thus we are enabled to serve him,—**IN HOLINESS.** (Luke i. 74) towards God, in dominion over, and deadness to sin; (Rom. vi. 11—14, 20, 22;) in victory over, and deadness to the world; (1 John ii. 15—17; v. 4.) in simplicity of intention, aiming at his glory in all things; (1 Cor. x. 31; Col. iii. 17;) in parity of affection, “serving him with a perfect,” or an undivided “heart;” (1 Chron. xxvii. 9;) in the exercise of all graces, as sincerity, (Josh. xxiv. 14;) humility, (Acts xx. 19,) resignation, patience, contentment, meekness. — **IN RIGHTEOUSNESS** towards our fellow-creatures; in *truth*, including integrity, veracity, fidelity, punctuality; in *justice*, not defrauding, over-reaching, taking advantage of the ignorance, inexperience, or necessity of those we deal with, but, in all cases, “doing to others as we would they should do to us;” in *mercy*, being pitiful, compassionate, and kind, to the ignorant and wicked, the afflicted and destitute, and that not merely in word, but in deed, not merely in inward feelings, but in outward actions; in *charity*, according to our ability, “doing good unto all men, but especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. vi. 10.)

This holiness and righteousness cannot exist where there is not temperance, sobriety, chastity, self-denial, and the proper government of a person’s appetites and passions.

We come now to consider,

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SERVING MAMMON.

Mammon is a Syriac word, frequently put in our Lord’s discourses for riches. See Luke xvi. 9, 11. Some think it derived from the Hebrew word, *אמן* *Amen*, and signifies whatever a person is apt to make an

object of confidence. And because men, generally put their trust in external advantages, such as riches, authority, honour, and power, the word is used to denote every thing of that kind, and *riches*, by way of eminence. Now to serve these is to be under their influence, so as to esteem, and think more highly of them, than of things spiritual and eternal, the favour and love of God, and the infinitely important matters of true religion; to desire them more, and to be more concerned about them, and more earnest in pursuit of them; to love them more, and take more pains to attain them; to rejoice in them, if attained, and put our trust in them for happiness; to grieve, fret, and be discontented and unhappy, if we have them not, envying those that have. In short, instead of overcoming to be overcome by them, (1 John v. 4,) and to be under their power, so that our peace of mind is entirely, so to speak, in their hands, and at their mercy. And as they are never, for any length of time, at one stay, but subject to continual fluctuation and change, so the peace of our minds, and our comfort, should be in a similar state.

Now these things being considered, the serving God, as before described, and the serving mammon, or the world, being contrasted the one to the other, it is most evident,

III. A MAN CANNOT SERVE BOTH.

As well might he ascend upward, when he is sinking downward; or, go to the east, while he is travelling to the west.

It has been shown that a man cannot serve God unless he know him, and that the saving knowledge of

God, is God's supernatural gift. Now this can only be attained by those that seek it "with all their hearts." But can a man be seeking God with all his heart, when he is seeking the world with all his heart? And can a man have the high esteem and reverence for God, the humiliation before him, the confidence in him, the love to him, the devotedness to his cause and glory, which, it has been shown, is essential to his service, while the same person is esteeming the world, seeking the honour and wealth of the world; is confiding in uncertain riches, delighting in them, or grieving for want of them? Can a man's heart be set on the attainment of reconciliation and peace with God, his favour, image, and communion with him, while it is set on the world and its vanities? St. James says, "The friendship of the world, is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore, will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God." (ch. iv. 4.) And St. John, that, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 Epist. ii. 15.) And St. Paul, that, "if he pleased men," or *sought to please men*, "he should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. i. 10.) And he speaks of the believers at Rome, as "being free from sin," before they "became servants to God." And Zacharias speaks of our "being delivered out of the hands," *i. e.* from the power "of our enemies," in order to our serving God. (Luke i. 74.) To serve God aright, is to serve him in "newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter;" (Rom. vii. 6;) but this we cannot do, unless we have received new spirits, or new hearts, that we may be able to live new lives. God "puts his Spirit within us," that we may "walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments;" (Ezek. xxxvi. 27;) and having saved us, by grace through faith,

from the guilt and power of sin, we become "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," and so we are enabled to "walk in them;" (Eph. ii. 10;) we love Christ, and from that principle keep his commandments. (John xiv. 15.) But "he that loveth me not," says Christ, "keepeth not my words," (ver. 24,) and, of course, serveth him not, for, "his servants we are, whom we obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness." (Rom. vi. 16.) On all these accounts it is, that the Apostle urges the necessity of "grace," in order to our "serving God acceptably." (Heb. xii. 28.) Even of enlightening, quickening, pardoning, renewing, strengthening, and comforting grace without which, no individual of the human race, since the fall of man, ever did, or could serve, or even worship God, in a right and acceptable manner. And that grace must be sought sincerely, earnestly, diligently, and perseveringly, in the use of all the private, domestic, social, and public means of grace, which no servant of mammon, no man of the world, ever did, or ever will thus seek.

Hence the important and necessary caution, subjoined by our Lord, against worldly and anxious cares in the verses following the text; a caution to which, all, who would receive saving grace, and through its influence serve God, should continually attend. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought," or rather, "Be not anxiously careful," the original word being so rendered in almost every other place where it occurs, "for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." A prudent foresight and diligence to supply the wants of life, which in other parts of Scripture is commended and enjoined,

(Rom. xii. 11,) cannot be here forbidden us; but those cares, which distract the mind, and engross the heart, which render us incapable of properly attending to the interests of our souls, show a want of faith in the Being, Perfections, and Providence of God, and are too decisive a proof that we are enslaved by the present world.—Then our Lord condescends to reason with us against these worldly anxieties; “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Did the infinite power and goodness of God create our bodies, and inspire them with the breath of life, and will he refuse to give that which is requisite to support them as long as it is his will we should continue in them?—Again, arguing from the care of Providence over the inferior creatures, he says, “Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.” Although they do not foresee their own necessities, or provide for them, yet are they nourished and preserved by the unwearied beneficence of God. “Are ye not much better than they?” Are ye not beings of a nobler order, designed for a higher end, and standing in a near relation to God, who is your heavenly Father, not only by creation, but, if believers in Christ Jesus, by adoption and regeneration? To you, therefore, it may be said, as by our Lord in another place, “Fear not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke xii. 6, 7.)—Besides all your anxious solicitude is unavailing; “Which of you by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?” or one moment to the length of his life?* The addition of a small por-

* The word *ἡλικία*, here rendered “*stature*,” as many learned men have said, ought to have been translated “*age*.”

tion to the length of our days on earth, is a circumstance in which the providence of God least appears, but however desirous we might be concerning it, we could not make that addition ourselves. "If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?" (See Luke xii. 26.)—But our Lord not only instructs us from the animal, but even from the vegetable part of the creation, and, to show the unreasonableness of anxiety concerning apparel, he bids us "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not," to prepare materials for their covering, "neither do they spin," or make use of any arts to procure their clothing, "and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these;" in a garment of such pure white, and curious workmanship. "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field," a thing of so short duration, and made for so mean a use, "which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you," who are possessed of an existence much more valuable, and designed for higher purposes? How deserving are many, even of the people of God, from their distrust in his Providence, of the rebuke which follows, "O ye of little faith." "Therefore," while we exert a prudent care to provide for the necessities of this life, "take no thought," no distracting and unbelieving thought, "saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"—Such anxious solicitude only becomes those who know not God, and are "strangers from the covenant of promise," for, our Lord adds, "after all these things do the Gentiles seek." Ignorant of a future life, and entirely devoted to the interests and enjoyments

of the present, the heathen laboured and prayed to their gods, for nothing but mere temporal blessings, and whatever moral virtue they admired, they conceived they were capable of obtaining for themselves.* It was therefore natural for them to be driven about on the billows of worldly care and disquietude. But that those who believe in God, and enjoy the promises of revelation, should be agitated by such cares, is almost incredible. Certainly those who are brought to the "liberty of his children," cannot be so enslaved; for they can confide in the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of their Heavenly Father, who "knoweth they have need of all these things."—Our Lord also intimates that his disciples should have more important matters to employ their thoughts about, and much higher hopes to engage their affections, than are connected with the things of this world. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God," which is internal and spiritual, (Rom. xiv. 17,) that God may reign in your hearts, and be the great object of your reverence, trust, and obedience; "and righteousness," even that which is "through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," (Phil. iii. 9,) the only means whereby we can be put in possession of the kingdom of God, in earth, or in heaven. And if you seek, as now directed, the kingdom of God, in the first place, and with a care absorbing all other anxieties, then, "all these things,"

* So Horace, Lib. I. Epist. 18.

Sed satis est orare Jovem, quæ donat et aufert:
Det vitam, det opes: æquum mihi animum ipse parabo.

And Juvenal, Sat. X. l. 362.

Monstro quod ipse tibi possis dare: semita certè
Tranquillæ per virtutem patet unica vitæ.

which pertain to the present life, "shall be added unto you" as far as will contribute to your real welfare, beyond which you cannot desire them. Our Lord concludes his gracious exhortation by a still further caution against worldly cares, particularly with reference to futurity; "Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." It is a merciful appointment that future events are concealed from us, so that it is vain and impertinent to think about to-morrow till it comes. The evils we anticipate may never occur. And if to-morrow bring fresh sorrows, it will also bring its supports and consolations. Besides, while we are indulging needless apprehensions, we are less able to endure our present trials. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Let us meet the evil then with confidence in God. with dependence on his mercy and assistance, and with submission to his will, living, as it were a day at a time, and spending every day as though it were our last on earth, with a reference to eternity. Thus whatever be our trials. they will appear but light and momentary, and, being sanctified by the grace of God, they will "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—How thankful should we be to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us in his Gospel instructions so directly calculated to promote our happiness, both in this world and the next!

LXV.

RELIGION THE FIRST OBJECT.

MATTHEW VI. 33.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

IT is the Son of God who speaks to us in these words, and, we should remember, there are four things which add peculiar force to every advice, exhortation, or command given by him,—his great love to us,—his perfect knowledge of us and of our wants,—his great glory and majesty,—and his absolute power and authority over us. The first of these, his *love*, he manifested in assuming our frail nature, with its many infirmities, in bearing our sins and sorrows, and living and dying for us. Considering this, we may be assured he would not knowingly deceive us, or give us any direction or command, but what he judged would be for our good. Regarding also the second of these considerations, that in him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” we may be certain he could not be deceived himself; but must know whether the advice he intended for our good really were so. When, again, we reflect on his great glory and majesty, we are compelled to own that such a being would not give his creatures trivial or unimportant directions; and, especially, that he would not stoop so low, and do, and suffer so much as he did, in order to teach and inculcate any such directions. And then it still further

enforces his advice, to consider that "all power is his in heaven and on earth;" that he "hath the keys of hell and of death;" that he can "open and no man can shut, and shut and no man can open;" that we are wholly in his hands, and that he can and will require it of us, if we do not take his counsel.

If these considerations be applicable to all the words spoken by our Lord, they are peculiarly so to the command now read in your hearing. For surely a kinder, wiser, or more important command was never given, or one which it more concerns us to obey. This must appear to all who consider it in connection with the context. See ver. 19—33.*

We shall consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH WE ARE
HERE COMMANDED TO SEEK.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

The kingdom here meant is that of the Messiah, which, it is said by Daniel. "the God of heaven would set up," (chap. ii. 44.) and is described, Rom. xiv. 17; implying the reign of Jehovah, in and through Christ, over mankind, and the erecting within them that kingdom, which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." This kingdom Adam possessed before his fall, and, on that account, he was himself a king, reigning over his thoughts, inclinations, affections, and tempers, over his appetites, senses, and

* These verses have been explained in the Introduction, and at the close, of Plan LXIV.

members, regulating their exercise, and applying them only to that use which accorded with the end of his creation and the divine will. He ruled likewise over the earth, and every inferior creature; having “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Gen. i. 28.)—But this kingdom man has lost, and is become a subject, or, rather, a slave, of earth and hell, of the flesh, the world, and the Devil. The miserable slavery to which he is reduced is the reverse of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. — —

The Messiah was sent to destroy the works of the Devil; to overthrow his kingdom, to rescue man, and to erect his own kingdom. This he does by the Gospel, which is, therefore, termed “the kingdom of God.” (Matt. xxi. 43; Luke ix. 60.) By this Gospel, received in faith, love, and obedience, man is rescued from slavery, and again restored to a portion of his first dominion over himself, the world, and the powers of darkness. — —

Thus he is prepared for the kingdom of glory, which is also termed “the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. vi. 9; xv. 50.) And it is most emphatically and properly so called; for in this kingdom God will reign, so to speak, like himself. He will display all his perfections, his wisdom, power, love, purity, justice, mercy, grace, to the enlarged and perfected comprehension of his glorified servants.—He will display all that he is, so that his people shall “see him as he is.” and “know as they are known.” He will display all that he has; all the infinite riches of his kingdom. And all these shall be given to them, to be possessed and enjoyed, as far as created beings can receive the perfections and glories

of the self-existent, infinite, and eternal God.—He will exalt them to reign with him; to be assessors with him in judgment; to be eternally victorious over all their enemies; to enjoy more than kingly honour, glory, riches, and happiness; to a near and most intimate, and everlasting relation to, and union with Jesus, the King of heaven, and with the Father through him.

The way to this kingdom, here and hereafter, is “God’s righteousness.” By this expression is sometimes meant,—The rectitude of the divine nature, his holiness and justice. (Rom. iii. 25, 26.)—The method of justifying sinners. (Rom. i. 17; iii. 21, 22; x. 3.)—As this is in consequence of repentance and faith in the righteousness of Christ; hence his obedience unto death is intended by the same expression. (Jer. xxiii. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30; Rom. x. 4.)—And faith, which, when “working by love,” is accepted by the mercy of God, through the merits of Christ, as our righteousness. (Rom. iv. 5; Phil. iii. 9.) This is all published in the Gospel, and is the way to the present kingdom of grace, and the future kingdom of glory. —

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE COMMAND HERE GIVEN TO SEEK THEM.

Man was not sent into the world to seek happiness by the gratification of his senses, to labour for the support of himself and family; to make his fortune, or acquire preferment and honour among his fellow-creatures; but to seek what he lost in Adam, “the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

But how should these blessings be sought? They must be sought earnestly, with all our heart, from a

sense of our want of them, and a conviction of their necessity, excellency, and attainableness; with desire, sincere, fervent, increasing, and restless.—Diligently, in the use of all means, as by breaking off our sins, exercising faith, hearing, reading, and meditating upon the word, by prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial; as misers seek wealth, the ambitious honour, libertines pleasure; by spiritual running, wrestling, fighting, “travailing in birth, until Christ be formed in us;”—for this “kingdom suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

When must they be sought?—“First;” before all other things; all which must be sold in order that this treasure may be bought, (Matt. xiii. 44,) because these are more necessary to our happiness. Other things cannot make us happy, but these can; other things are uncertain and temporal, but these are fixed and eternal; if we do not attain other things, we can but die temporally, as to the body, but if we do not attain these, we die eternally, as to the soul.—Therefore, they are to be sought first in life, in childhood, in youth.—First, in the week, on the Sundays; in the day, every morning. — They must be sought immediately. If we delay till to-morrow, or even an hour hence, it may be too late; for we may die, or God may cease to permit his Holy Spirit to influence and assist us.

Where must they be sought?—In the closet; in the family; in the house of God; at the altar; even at work; when walking by the way; above all under the cross, and at the throne of grace. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. xviii. 20.)

How long must we seek them? Till we find, and are “found in Christ, not having on our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Phil. iii. 9.)

III. THE PROMISE MADE TO THOSE WHO SEEK.

“All these things shall be added unto you.”

The hinderances to the seeking these blessings, with respect to many, arise, not from open sin, but from worldly cares. These, therefore, are guarded against in this promise.

Food, raiment, habitation, health, contentment, friends, reputation, success in lawful pursuits, and all good things in the present life, as far as they can contribute to your real welfare, shall be bestowed upon you, if you seek, as you are directed, “first,” and principally, the kingdom of God. Godliness has “the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” (1 Tim. iv. 8.) If God give his kingdom and righteousness to those who earnestly seek for them, he will much more give us the necessities of this world. If he give us what is greater, he will also give us the less. If the field be given, the hedge will be given; if medicine, the vial; if we “buy goods, (as Henry says,) paper and packthread, will be given into the bargain.” We are assured no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Instances of the truth of this declaration we have in the history of Abraham—Jacob—Joseph—David—Daniel—the Widow of Sarepta.—Instances of an opposite

nature, also proving the declaration, in the old world, Sodom—Saul—Nebuchadnezzar—Belshazzar—Dives.

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The subject may be APPLIED to four descriptions of persons—the rich in this world,—the poor—the ungodly—the self-righteous. — — —

LXVI.

DOING THE WILL OF GOD NECESSARY FOR AN ENTRANCE INTO HEAVEN.

MATTHEW VII. 21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

To enter into the kingdom of heaven is the desire and expectation of almost all those who believe there is such a kingdom, the most abandoned not excepted. These, at times, are heard to express their hopes of salvation, and that on occasions when one would not expect to hear any thing of the kind, as in common conversation, in mixed companies, in the midst of business, nay, of riot and excess. And, converting these hopes into a kind of oath, they frequently swear that any thing they affirm is as true “as they hope to be saved!” What! and do these wretches also hope to be saved?—Yes; if we may judge from their own expressions, it seems they do.—But, it may be asked, with what propriety, and on what foundation, do they ground

their hopes?—Oh! this is a point into which it never enters their thoughts once to inquire; no; nor does it enter into the thoughts of thousands, who are not of so abandoned a character; but who, nevertheless, have as little reason from the Holy Scriptures to expect salvation in the state in which they are, as those just mentioned.

Who, my brethen, can describe the greatness, the prevalency, and the destructive nature of that delusion, whereby mankind persuade themselves, or suffer themselves to be persuaded, that they may be saved in some other way, than that which the oracles of God point out, and while they have not sought, and are not disposed to seek the religion therein described? The Lord Jesus seems evidently to have uttered the words of our text, with the whole paragraph out of which they are taken, under a foresight that this delusion would prevail among his pretended followers, and with a view to guard all who would lay his word to heart against its fatal influence, or to deliver them from it. “Not every one,” says he, “that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,” &c. Words, which must appear most forcible, important, and alarming, to all who duly consider their genuine meaning, the authority of Him who spake them, and the solemn occasion on which they were uttered, and which, therefore, ought to be diligently considered, and constantly kept in mind, by all those who would not build upon the sand, and deceive themselves with hopes of entering into heaven, in a way not warranted by God in his word.

Consider we,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY SAYING, "LORD, LORD," AND THE VANITY OF HOPING TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IN THIS WAY, HOW PRONE SOEVER WE MAY BE TO DO IT.

The saying, "Lord, Lord," here, must, in the lowest sense, imply the acknowledging Jesus of Nazareth to be the Lord Christ, that is, the true Messiah expected by the Jews, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. In the dark ages of the church, to be brought to acknowledge so much, was deemed conversion, and, in this way, whole nations have been converted by force of arms, by the fear of temporal calamities, or hopes of temporal advantage. And this is still thought by many, in all parts of Christendom, a sufficient title to heaven; at least it is all on which thousands have to ground their confidence. For, on what else can they build it?—On their knowledge or orthodoxy? No; for they are utterly unacquainted with the doctrines of the Gospel, and even with all the articles of the christian faith.—On their morality, or unblameable conduct? By no means; for they neither obey Christ's laws, nor follow his example.—On their attendance on ordinances, or their form of godliness? Surely not; for they have almost as little of the form as of the power.—Much less do they build their hopes on their being justified or regenerated; for they make no pretences to any thing of the kind.—Nevertheless they expect to go to heaven. But how inconsistent is this! What avails it to own Christ as "a teacher come from God," with extraordinary powers and credentials, and not to study and lay to heart his doctrine, so as to understand, experience, and

practise it? To own him as the High Priest of our Profession, and a Mediator between God and us, yet neither to renounce our sins on the one hand, nor our own righteousness on the other, so as wholly to depend on his mediation? Or to acknowledge him as the King, that is, the Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge of his Church, and yet not to be subject to his sway?

Objection. But, St. Paul says, (Rom. x. 9,) that “if we confess with our mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in our heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, we shall be saved;” and St. John, (1 Epist. iv. 15,) that, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.”—In answer to this objection we may observe, that these verses refer to the times of persecution, when such a confession exposed persons to imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom, and was a sufficient proof of their sincerity. They, however, imply more than is generally imagined. “If thou shalt openly and freely confess thy faith in Christ and his truths, both by words and deeds, in the face of opposition and danger, ‘and shalt believe in thine heart’ sincerely, and with a faith that influences thy heart, ‘that God hath raised him from the dead,’ and thereby demonstrated him to be his Son and the Messiah, established his authority as a Lawgiver, manifested the certain truth and infinite importance of his doctrine, the acceptableness and efficacy of the atonement which he made for sin; hath broken the power of death, and ensured to his followers an immortal life; as also the Holy Spirit to prepare them for it, by raising them from the ‘death of sin to the life of righteousness,’ ‘thou shalt be saved’ from sin here, and its consequences hereafter.”

The latter text may be thus paraphrased, "Whosoever shall," from a principle of loving faith, openly "confess," maintaining this profession with resolution and zeal, and acting in conformity to it, "that Jesus is the Son of God," the Christ, the Saviour of the world, "God abideth in him and he in God;" there is a blessed union between God and his soul, so that it is in the language of Scripture, "the habitation of God," who, as it were, lives and walks in him. (Eph. ii. 22; 1 Cor. iii. 16; 2 Cor. vi. 18.) —

The saying "Lord, Lord," may mean the acknowledging Christ to be God, and the calling upon him as such, (1 Cor. i. 2,) and the attending the ordinances of his appointment. This is the only ground of the confidence of many. But what a false foundation! For what avails the form without the power of religion; which power no man possesses, who does not do the will of God. — —

Objection. But St. Paul tells us, (Rom. x. 13,) that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."—But the expression, "call upon the name of the Lord," implies the whole of religion, particularly prayer offered up in faith; and the meaning is, Whosoever, having heard the Gospel, shall repent and believe in Christ, and call upon him, or shall make application to God in prayer, through him, shall be saved both from temporal and eternal destruction.

By saying "Lord, Lord," we may also understand the being peculiarly earnest and frequent in prayer; on this many ground their hope. Still this is a false ground, and avails nothing, if there be not a consistency between our prayers and our lives. See Luke xiii. 25; Matt. xxv. 5—13; and the text. Without this,

our prayers, however fervent and constant, are but vain repetitions.

The saying, "Lord, Lord," includes further, the claiming a relation to Christ, and an interest in him as our Lord and Master; the addressing him as *my Lord*, with confidence. This is a foundation on which many build. They have accustomed themselves to use this language, and wrought themselves up into a persuasion that Christ is their Lord and Saviour, and hence they conclude they are in a good state. But they ought to consider what right they have for this claim; on what terms Christ offers to become our Lord and Saviour, and whether they comply with those terms. To the objection that Thomas used that language, (John xx. 28,) and that confidence is recommended in the Epistle to the Hebrews; (chap. iii. 6, 14;) we may reply, that there is a difference between using such language in truth, our prevailing temper and conduct being agreeable to it, and in hypocrisy and inconsistency; and that while it is a virtue to hold fast a confidence that is well grounded, it is a vice to hold that fast which is built upon the sand. —

The saying, "Lord, Lord," may include also thinking and speaking highly of Christ and recommending him, his truth and grace, to others. Some evidently lay a great stress on this, and think well of themselves because they are in the habit of doing it. And it must be allowed that it is commendable and necessary to do it, where a proper foundation has been laid for it, and where the heart is right with God, his saving grace having been received. But, without this, it is considered by Christ as a vain compliment, and, as the

next verses show, is no better than saying "Lord, Lord." — —

To conclude this head. The kingdom of God, whether in heaven or on earth, that is, his Church, whether in a triumphant or a militant state is a society of enlightened, holy, happy, persons, united together in love, and by a participation of the same nature, inclinations, employments, and enjoyments, under Christ their head. Now into this kingdom, people cannot be admitted on such easy terms as many imagine. Qualifications of an inward, solid, and durable kind, are necessary. and such as imply in them, illumination of mind, and holiness of heart; *viz*, a conformity to God the Father, to the Lord Jesus, to the Holy Angels, and to the saints of God. But all the above particulars may exist while these qualifications are wanting. — —

This leads me to consider,

II. THE NECESSITY OF DOING THE WILL OF GOD, IN ORDER TO OUR ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, AND WHAT THAT WILL IS.

On this head the Prophets and Apostles are unanimous, as also our Lord Jesus Christ, the wisdom and word of God incarnate, and they are all faithful and true witnesses, and were commissioned from heaven to make the way thither known to mankind, confirming their testimony by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles. Were I to quote all they have advanced upon this subject, I might quote most of their writings. Let it suffice to produce a few instances. "O that there were such an heart in them," said God by Moses, "that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and

with their children for ever!" (Deut. v. 29.) "See," said he at another time, "I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments." (Deut. xxx. 15.) "Hath the Lord as great delight," said Samuel, "in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams." (1 Sam. xv. 22.) "Then shall I not be ashamed," said David, "when I have respect unto thy commandments." (Psal. cxix. 6.) "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter," said Solomon, "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccles. xii. 13.) "If ye be willing and obedient," said Isaiah, "ye shall eat the good of the land" (Ch. i. 19.) See also Rom. ii. 7—9; Heb. v. 9; Jam. i. 22; 1 Pet. 14, 15; 1 John ii. 3—6; Rev. xxii. 14. But, especially, let us attend to the solemn declaration of our Lord immediately following the text. (Verses 22—29.)

This will of God, our Father who is in heaven, consists of two parts, the one experimental and the other practical. Both are mentioned and inculcated, Heb. xiii. 21.

The EXPERIMENTAL part includes—Repentance. (Matt. iii. 2; Luke xiii. 3—5; Acts xvii. 30, 31.) This implies conviction of sin, sorrow for it, hatred to it, and a resolution to forsake it, and is represented by our Lord in this Sermon, as poverty of spirit, holy mourning, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness. — Faith in Christ and in the Gospel; (John iii. 14—17, 36; vi. 28, 29; 1 John iii. 23;) — —

which, though is our duty, is nevertheless God's gift, operated in us by him (Eph. ii. 8; Col. ii. 12.) — — A hope of everlasting life, arising from our being God's children by the forementioned faith, and consequently heirs of God. (Heb. vi. 11, 12.)—Love to God, Christ and his people; to all mankind, and our enemies. This is a most important branch of the will of God. (Matt. xxii. 36—40; Mark xii. 28—33; Rom. xiii. 8—10; Gal. v. 14; 1 Tim. i. 5; 1 Cor. xiii. 1.)—A thorough change of nature. (John iii. 3; Matt. xviii. 3; 2 Cor. v. 17.)—Entire sanctification, (1 Thess. iv. 3; Heb. xii. 14; 1 Pet. i. 16;) implying the having power over, and being cleansed from sin, the being endowed with divine grace, the being consecrated to God, and employed for him. — —

This leads me to observe that the will of God is **PRACTICAL**. All the inward graces which have been mentioned must manifest themselves by their outward fruits, and the work of God in us must be evidenced in our spirit and behaviour, or it is but a name: *e. g.* Our repentance must be evidenced by our bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. (Isai. i. 16, 17; lv. 6, 7; Matt. iii. 8—10; Luke iii. 8—14; xiii. 6, 7.)—Our faith must work by love. (Gal. v. 6; Jam. ii. 1, 8, 14.)—Our hope must produce purity, (1 John iii. 3;) and diligence, (1 Cor. xv. 58; Heb. vi. 11.)—Our love must show itself by obedience to God; (John xiv. 15; 1 John v. 3;) by living to Christ; (Rom. xiv. 7; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15;) by doing good to our brethren in Christ; (1 John iii. 14—22;) by truth, justice, mercy towards all men, (Matt. vii. 12; Jam. i. 25—27;) — — — by doing good to our enemies. (Matt. v. 43—48; Rom. xii. 19, 20.)—Our regeneration, or new creation, must be evidenced by its fruits. (Matt. xii. 33; vii. 16—20; Eph. ii. 10.)—Our

sanctification also by our good works. (Tit. ii. 14; Heb. xiii. 21.) 'The degree and strength, or virtue, of our grace must be shown by our victory over the world and the flesh, Satan, sin, and death. (Rom. viii. 2—4; vi. 6, 12, 14, &c.; Gal. v. 24; Eph. vi. 10; 1 John ii. 14—17; v. 4, 5; Rev. iii. 5, 12, 21.)—And all this to the end of our life. (Rev. ii. 26.)

III. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO DO THIS WILL OF OUR FATHER.

We cannot do it by our own wisdom or power. (John xv. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 5.)—As practical religion proceeds from experimental, in the same manner as good fruit from a good tree, so experience flows from a knowledge of the truth; as the tree is nourished by the roots of it, and by the soil in which it grows. We must therefore know the will of God that we may do it. (John xiii. 17.) Now this we cannot do by our own wisdom. (1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.)—Inward experience, and the graces of God's Spirit, can only be where the Spirit is. Repentance, faith, hope, love, a new nature are all the gifts of God. (Acts v. 31; Eph. ii. 8; James i. 18.)—If we could both know and experience the will of God of ourselves, still of ourselves we could not practise it, for want of inclination and of ability.

We can only do it by grace affording knowledge, (Jer. xxxi. 34,) and experience, (*ibid.* ver. 33,) and inclination, and power to practise. (Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.)

*We must, however, use the means, as the Word of God, that we may gain knowledge; prayer, that we may obtain grace; (Luke xi. 13;) diligence, watchfulness, and self-denial, that we may use the grace received. —

LXVII.

CHRIST'S NEARNESS AND AFFECTION TO
HIS DISCIPLES.

MATTHEW XII. 50.

Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

WELL might it be said that Jesus spake as never man spake! How instructive, and how important, was every expression that dropped from his lips! And that, not only when he was delivering a solemn and continued discourse, but even in his ordinary conversation, nay, and in every digression, which any incident led him to make in his discourses!

It appears from the preceding paragraph, that he had just healed one who was possessed of a devil, blind and dumb, (ver. 22,) which had much astonished all the people, and almost persuaded them that he was the Christ, the Son of David. But the Pharisees, who could not endure that a person so poor and despised, and whose life and doctrine so reproached them, should be thought to be the Messiah, endeavoured, in defiance of all reason, and contrary to their own better knowledge, to persuade the people that he "cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." (ver. 24.) Our Lord, therefore, saw it necessary, out of compassion to those who were likely to be misled by them, to

confute their wicked and malicious insinuation. This he does in a most admirable manner, and, to their greater mortification and confusion, he shows them to be guilty of blasphemy, in attributing to the Devil, those miracles which he gave full proof of performing by the Holy Spirit of God. (Ver. 31. and Mark iii. 28—30.) Also, after other admonitions, he predicts the awful consequences of their continuing to reject him and his Gospel, under the parable of the relapsed demoniac. But, while engaged in uttering these solemn truths and warnings, in the audience of the people, he was interrupted by one who informed him, “Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee;” they themselves not being able to approach him for the multitude. What was the immediate object they had in view in coming at this unseasonable time, cannot be certainly known; whether they were afraid he might overspend himself, or whether they were alarmed for his safety after he had so offended the Pharisees. - But Jesus, disapproving their design, of which he could not be ignorant, would not be interrupted in the important work in which he was engaged, and, without meaning any slight to his relations, and especially to his mother, to whom on other occasions he evinced the utmost respect, (Luke ii. 51, and John xix. 26, 27,) he only noticed their interference, to express in a most endearing manner, that his spiritual affections towards his disciples were stronger than any natural love he had to them. For “he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is

in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”*

Observe we,

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

“They do the will of our Father which is in heaven.”

The will of God which Christ came to teach, and which his disciples do, relates,—To what we are to believe; *viz.*, the great and essential doctrines of the Gospel.—To what we are to experience; repentance, faith, love, justification by the blood of Christ, regeneration, and sanctification by his Spirit. It is not enough to know and believe these things, but we must experience them.—To what we are to be; wise, holy, unblameable, useful, temperate, chaste, “conformed to the image of God’s Son” (Rom. viii. 29.)—To what we are to do; to cultivate truth, justice, mercy, charity, and to serve God and our generation,—and to the spirit in which we are to do all.—To what we are to suffer; reproach, loss of goods, bonds, imprisonments, nay, and death, rather than desert Christ and his cause,—and to the spirit in which we are to suffer all.—To what we are to enjoy; pardon of sins, the divine favour, adoption, the testimony of a good con-

* “This short speech, related by the Evangelists with great simplicity, is, without their seeming to have designed it, one of the finest encomiums imaginable. Could the most elaborate panegyric have done Jesus Christ and his religion half the honour, which this divine sentiment hath done them?” It must be regarded as “a high commendation, and not a reflection upon our Lord’s mother, who, without doubt, was among the chief of those who did the will of God. What veneration should live in the hearts of men for Jesus and his religion, which exhibits such perfection in goodness!”—MACKNIGHT.

science, a hope of eternal life, joy in the Holy Ghost, and communion with God.

It is not enough that we hear, know, esteem, and converse of this, as the will of God, but we must comply with it. — —

II. HOW NEAR AND DEAR THEY ARE TO CHRIST.

“The same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

He regards them, with an affection more constant and tender, than he felt to his earthly relations, as such. “They preferred Christ,” says HENRY, “to their relations according to the flesh; and, to make them amends, he prefers them to his.” An ample amends this indeed!

They are *near* to him, as relations, inasmuch as they not only bear his name, but partake of his likeness, his nature, and belong to his family, being made the children of his heavenly Father. — —

They are *dear* to him as such. He loves them above all others; has their welfare at heart; does a kinsman’s part in caring and providing for them, in sympathizing with them, and sharing in their joys and sorrows. — —

He admits them into his presence, and to his table; he dwells among them, and converses, or corresponds, freely with them. — —

He is not ashamed of them, although they be poor. When he died, he left them rich legacies; and now he is, in his kingdom, he does not forget them, but defends, supports, and comforts them, by many rich donations, and will confess them before all the principalities and powers of the universe, and will have them all, at last, to live and reign with him for ever.

270 *Christ's Nearness and Affection to his Disciples.*

III. HOW NEAR AND DEAR THEY ARE, OR OUGHT TO BE, TO EACH OTHER.

Being all nearly related to the Lord Jesus, they are also nearly related to each other. They not only bear the same common name of Christians, and resemble each other in bearing the image of Christ, but they partake of one and the same nature, and are of one and the same family. "He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one," (Heb. ii. 11,) not only of one father Adam, but of one Father, God, whose Spirit, whose nature, is in them. This shall subsist and be a firm and indissoluble bond of union among them, when the ties of flesh and blood, and all carnal relationships, are no more. When the spiritual husband and his carnal wife, the spiritual child and his ungodly parents, when the true Christian and the false professor, are for ever separated, this participation of one common divine nature, will preserve the followers of Jesus in one inseparable bond of eternal union.

They should be also exceedingly dear to each other. Notwithstanding any little difference in opinion about non-essential matters, modes of worship, and outward rites, they should esteem, desire, and delight in each other as "the excellent of the earth;" they should be concerned for each other's welfare; should care, and according to their ability, provide for each other, sympathize with each other, and participate in each other's joys and sorrows. — —

They should be free and familiar with each other, and have intercourse and fellowship one with another, not only willingly, worshipping in the same place, but being "of one accord," of one heart. — —

They must not be ashamed of each other, though poor, or despised, among men, but acknowledge, support, and comfort each other, and profess their hope and expectation of dwelling together for ever. — —

LXVIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATTHEW XIII. 9.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

IT is well known that the way of instructing by parables, or similies, pursued by our Lord, was very common in ancient times, as we may learn from the Old Testament, and especially in eastern countries. Throughout Syria, Persia, India; the Philosophers, Rabbis, Magi, Bramins, and other professors of science, and pretenders to wisdom, generally taught their disciples in this way. And, it must be confessed, that this method of instruction has several advantages. For, while it engages the attention, it helps both the conception and memory of the hearer, giving him clearer views of the subject, and making it sink more deeply into his mind and heart.

Our Lord's parables had a peculiar advantage in these respects, as they were generally taken from those objects about which his hearers were daily employed.

And, whatever some may insinuate to the contrary, the profit, at least, of the serious part of his audience, was what he had chiefly in view in this manner of speaking. If any of these did not understand his parables, they were always at liberty to apply to himself for information. I said, *chiefly*, because, it seems, one end of his speaking in parables was, that he might conceal those truths from proud and careless hearers, in which he had previously instructed them, in plainer language, without effect; and which he foresaw they would still abuse to their greater condemnation. This he did by an awful mixture of mercy with judgment. For while he thus justly deprived them of that plain and familiar instruction which they had before neglected to improve, at the same time by concealing the truth from them, under the cover of those allegories, which they would not be at the pains to understand, he mercifully prevented their treasuring up still more “wrath against the day of wrath,” by a further abuse of their mercies.

The truth of these observations, concerning parables in general, being sufficiently manifest from the private conversation which our Lord had with his disciples on this very subject, as related in a following paragraph of this same chapter, I do not stay to enlarge upon its proof, but proceed to consider that particular parable, which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation; a parable peculiarly worthy of our most serious attention, as appears from the striking sentence wherewith it is concluded, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” These words, and others of the like kind, sometimes used by our Lord, his Prophets, and Apostles, in the introduction or conclusion of their discourses, are by no means expletives, or words of

course, but they declare the passage, to which they are annexed, to be of more than ordinary consequence, and, therefore, especially deserving a most attentive consideration. Hearken ye, then, and consider, one and all, whoever you are, if you have but ears to hear, and a heart to understand, hear and understand the parable of the sower!

A conviction of the importance of this parable, as further appears from the particular desire expressed by our Lord's disciples to have it explained to them, and the great pains our Lord took to explain it, induces me to offer you a few remarks upon it, which I do with the greater cheerfulness, because, as Christ has given us a key to it, there is the less danger of my misrepresenting it. Consider we then, part by part, the parable, and his explanation.

"Behold," says the wisdom of God, attend, take notice, "a sower went out to sow." If you ask, whom this sower represents. I answer, Christ himself, in the first place, and, in a secondary sense, every Minister sent by him, to make known his will to the children of men. And if you inquire, whither this sower went out to sow? I reply, into the world, that immense and barren field, which Christ purchased with his precious blood, that he might sow it with the word of God, even the blessed truths of the everlasting Gospel, and so might receive good fruit from it, "to the praise of his glorious grace." This field he cultivates and prepares for the seed in a variety of ways. He cleans, weeds, and ploughs it, by afflictions and temptations. He manures it with the fattening and enriching influences of his grace, and causes the dew of his blessing to descend upon it; and hence he looks that it should bring

forth fruit, answerable, in some degree, to the pains he has taken with it, and the expense he has bestowed upon it. But, alas! how seldom are his expectations answered! “He looked that his vineyard should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.”

Now, concerning the causes of this unfruitfulness, which it much concerns us to know, that we may avoid them, we are particularly informed in this parable. The chief hinderances of our bearing fruit are here specified, and that in the order in which they generally occur. Here are four different kinds of ground mentioned, and only one kind is fruitful, not because of any difference in the seed, wherewith the others were sown, or any defect in the cultivation of them, but for other reasons specified in the parable. And these were designed to represent to us four classes of hearers of the word of God: only one of which find the Gospel to be the power of God unto salvation, and walk worthy of it, not because different doctrine is declared to the others, or less labour bestowed upon them, but because of the hinderances of fruitfulness spoken of in the explanation of the parable. For let me observe, before I proceed, that we are not now to consider the case of waste uncultivated ground, but of that which is tilled, manured, and sown. Why is not this equally fruitful? We have now to do, not with Heathens, Mahometans, Jews, or even with those Christians, so called, who never hear the Gospel clearly preached, but with them to whom the word of salvation is sent, and among whom the ordinances of God are purely administered. Why do any of these receive the grace of God in vain? “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear!”

“And I. When he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls of the air,” hungry and rapacious, “came and devoured them up.” They had high-ways and beaten paths through their corn-fields, where the seed that fell, not sinking into the ground, lay uncovered and exposed, and, consequently, was partly “trodden down,” and partly devoured by the fowls, (Luke viii. 5,) who would not fail to pick it up. As, therefore, there was no seed left in those places, no fruit could be expected. Attend we to our Lord’s explanation of this.

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away what was sown in his heart.” Observe, he “hears the word,” he is present when the Gospel is preached, and that perhaps at all opportunities. But, he “understands not,” is not acquainted with the meaning of what he hears. The reason of this is not the mysteriousness of the doctrine, or the obscurity and inaccuracy wherewith the Preacher delivers it, but partly inattention, and partly neglect of prayer in the hearer. It is owing to *inattention*. He does not seriously regard what he hears; but he is otherwise employed. He is thinking of what he did yesterday, or what he will do to-morrow,—of some worldly concern or other. Hence, though he perceives the sound of the words, the sense is quite lost to him. Or, perhaps, he is sleeping, or diverting and gratifying himself with the persons and appearance of those who are present, or with the style and manner of the Preacher. Nay, it is well if he did not come to make sport of what he should hear, and with a direct purpose, not only to obstruct his own benefit, but to hinder as many others

from attending as he can. But there is another cause why the Gospel is not understood, when clearly and plainly preached, and that is *neglect of prayer*. However clearly the light shines around us, we are still in darkness, if we are ourselves blind. So it is also in spiritual matters. By nature we are blinded, through the influence of sin and Satan, and "our foolish heart is darkened." Hence, how clearly soever the Gospel is preached, how plainly soever its truths are set forth, we cannot, in such a state of mind, understand what is delivered. The Spirit must "guide us into all truth," or we shall remain in error; the "unction of the Holy one" must teach us all things or we shall be still ignorant, notwithstanding the teaching of men and books. Now if any one would receive the Spirit, he must pray for it; "If any man lack," and desire, this "wisdom, he must ask" it of God. He that would be profited by what he hears, must lift up his heart to God for the teaching of his Spirit, to be superadded to the teaching of his word. If he neglect this, it is no wonder, though he attend ever so closely, that he should not understand.

But *μη συνιεντος*, may with equal propriety be rendered *considereth it not*. It is needful, in order to its bringing forth fruit, not only that the seed sink into the ground, but also that it be covered up. Otherwise it is still exposed to the rapacity of the birds, who are ever ready to catch it up. In like manner, when the word is understood, and so sinks into our minds, it is further necessary, it should be recollected and meditated upon. Thus it will, as it were, strike its root downward, and fill the heart with holy desires and dispositions; thus will it shoot its stalk upward, and produce

all holiness of conversation. But if this be neglected, if the word be not covered with the harrow of meditation, "the wicked one" will not fail to embrace the opportunity, and steal away "that which was sown in the heart."

His first point is to prevent God's field from being sown at all, well knowing, no fruit can reasonably be expected when no seed is sown. In other words, his first aim is to hinder people from coming to hear altogether, that they may still remain in ignorance and sin, barren and unfruitful in righteousness. If he cannot accomplish this, his next point is, in some way or other, to prevent their understanding what they hear, as by engaging their attention about other things, and hindering them from prayer. But if he fails in this attempt also, he has still another chance left, and that is, to steal out of their memories and affections the truths received. This he does, partly by his own immediate agency, filling the mind with thoughts of a different nature, and exciting or encouraging other desires and cares; and, partly, by the persons he employs for that purpose. Such are all those who introduce unsuitable conversation, when people should be considering what they have heard. He contrives likewise, with the same view, to entangle persons in a multiplicity of business, that they may want time for reflection, and invents a diversity of pleasures and amusements wherewith to divert them from it.

Hence it is, that, perhaps, a majority of those who generally hear the Gospel, are not profited thereby. They understand not what they hear, or forget it directly. What wonder then, if they are "hearers of the word and not doers, deceiving" not others only,

but also and especially, "themselves." They stumble at the very threshold, and never get over the very first hinderance here mentioned. They receive the seed as "by the way-side." This, however, blessed be God, is not the case with all. With regard to many, it falls into a different soil. But, even of these, numbers miscarry, and become unfruitful. Their case we are next to consider.

II. "Some fell upon stony places," (*ἐπὶ τὰ πετρωδῆ*), *upon rocky places*, "where they had not much earth." They had a little earth, it seems, but not much, either above them, to retard their springing, or under them, to nourish their roots; and "forthwith," or speedily, "they sprung up," and looked very promising, "because they had no deepness of earth." On this account, not being at liberty to strike their root downward, they so much the sooner shot their blade upward. And, "when the sun was up, they were scorched," by the warmth of his beams, "and, because they had not root," no room for taking root in so shallow a bed of earth, and lacked moisture," (so Luke,) "they withered away." Though they had been scorched by the sun, yet, if they had had sufficient depth of earth, wherein to take root, and had not lacked moisture, they would not have withered away; nay, the influence of the sun would rather have contributed to their growth.

Observe now our Lord's explanation of this. To stony ground places he compares the man "who heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it." This person goes further than the one before considered. He not only hears the word, hears it with attention, and in a spirit of prayer understands what he hears, and meditates upon it, but he "receives" it. He has

nothing to object against the word preached to him. He fully assents to it, firmly believes it, and cheerfully embraces it, and that "straightway," (εὐθύς,) *immediately*. He does not delay, or hesitate at all; but directly closes in with the doctrine he hears. Nay, he receives it "with joy," struck doubtless, with the beauty of the truth, flushed with the hopes of advantage, and the prospect of a safe and easy way to heaven, while he is touched and drawn by the preventing grace of God.

So far he goes on pretty well, though I have some little to object against him. For I do not like his receiving the word *immediately*. It seems to indicate that he does not consider and try it enough; does not "count the cost." There would be more probability of his "holding fast that which is good," if he first "proved all things;" more probability of his enduring to the end, if he acted with more deliberation.—I object also to his receiving it *with joy*. I fear it is a sign he does not know himself; what a guilty, polluted, helpless, hell-deserving sinner he is. Did he know this, he would mourn first, and then rejoice; he would have begun with sorrow, and ended with joy. He begins at the wrong end; a dry spring promises a bad harvest. They must "sow in tears," who would reap in joy. Let us see, however, the consequence. "Yet hath he not root in himself." And no wonder; there is too much blade. This exhausts the seed, so that it cannot shoot deep and nourish its root. The sudden joy wherewith he receives the word is an indication that it does not sink deep. It does not take root in his understanding. He does not thoroughly know, and is not deeply sensible of, the vanity of the world, the

shortness of time, the length of eternity, the worth of the soul, the happiness of heaven, the misery of hell. It does not take root in his conscience. He is not truly convinced of the sins he has committed, the guilt he has contracted, and the punishment he deserves. He does not see the evil of sin, and the fatal consequences of it, and, therefore, he is not uneasy on account of it. Hence the word does not take root in his will and affections. He is not determined against all sin, and resolutely bent on holiness. He does not hate and abhor his sins; sorrow in a godly manner for them, and flee from them. He does not love and desire holiness, rejoice in it, and follow after it. Hence we need not think it strange that he endureth but for a while;" (*προσχαυρος εστι,*) that he is a *temporary believer*, if he may be called a believer at all; "for when tribulation or persecution ariseth; because of the word, by and by" (*ευθυς,*) *immediately*, "he is offended;" he soon became hot. and becomes soon cold; immediately he received the word, and immediately was offended. "What is easily got," says HENRY, "is easily lost. Where there is not a principle, though there should be a profession, there will not be perseverance. A ship without ballast, though it may, at first, outsail the laden vessel, will certainly fail in stress of weather."

"When tribulation or persecution ariseth."—By tribulation we may, perhaps, understand, troubles more immediately arising from God's providence, such as losses and disappointments in the world, schemes broken, expectations frustrated, and hopes blasted in the way of business, whence succeed poverty, want, and often disgrace too. Add to these, the death or distress of relations and friends, together with bodily afflictions

of various kinds. These trials the children of God have endured, more or less, in all ages, and they are an evidence of our sonship; for “if we are without chastening,” (*παιδεία*,) *discipline*, “whereof all” God’s children “are partakers, then are we bastards and not sons. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

But, besides this, persecution also attends the word, and the professors of it, and that in various forms. Sometimes their names only will be cast out as evil. They will be reviled, slandered, mocked, derided, insulted, and a huge outcry raised against them,—“Away with such fellows from the earth, for they are not fit to live.” Sometimes the malice of the wicked against them proceeds to measures of greater violence, as “the spoiling of their goods,” and the abuse and injury of their bodies. And it is well if the chief magistrate does not countenance these violent proceedings, and exert the authority, and employ that power in the encouragement of vice and ungodliness, and the suppression of piety and virtue, which were entrusted with him for very contrary purposes. If so, the people of God may expect their estates will be confiscated, their persons imprisoned, and frequently they have been “scourged, stoned, sawn a-nder, slain with the sword;” obliged “to wander about in sheep-skins and goat skins, destitute, afflicted, tormented.” They wandered in “deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.” Thus have the saints suffered in former ages, and in one or other of these ways they suffer in this age, and will suffer as long as any of the seed of the serpent exists on earth; as long as saints and sinners

dwell together. "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution "

Our Lord has not laid these stones of stumbling in the way of Zion-travellers, without good reason. His design is, the trial of professors; that they, who are wilfully blind and foolishly self-sufficient, and notwithstanding their ignorance and weakness, say presumptuously, "we see" we are able, may stumble and fall over them, and no longer hinder and incommode true Christians, with their empty, lukewarm profession. At the same time, the saints, by this means learn more and more to know themselves, and to trust in him alone, who has promised his grace shall be sufficient for them. Thus it is manifested, who has true faith, hope, love, and who not. They who have them, hold on their way, and grow stronger and stronger, and those who have them not, turn aside into by-paths, and find a thousand plausible pretences for leaving so narrow and rugged a road. Thus, what helps the one party, hurts the other; as the same sun, which warms and cherishes the grain which is well rooted, scorches, withers, and burns up that which wants root. "The cross of Christ, like his word, is a savour of death unto death to some, while it is a savour of life unto life to others. The same tribulation and persecution which drive some to apostacy and ruin, work out for others a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory." Alas! what numbers stumble at these stones of stumbling, and rocks of offence! Alas! how many who avoid the first hinderance, not being way-side hearers, do not avoid this, but receive the seed as upon stony places, and hence reap only an aggravated condemnation, and an

increased misery from the seed sown in their hearts! Proceed we now to the next class.

III. "Some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them." Under the word "thorns," is included brambles, thistles, and every other kind of weed, which is apt to spring up amongst corn, and to prevent its growth and fruitfulness. Weeds, of whatever kind, do not usually appear immediately when the corn is sown, nor perhaps till long after. The corn takes root, springs up, and perhaps, even covers the ground, and promises a plentiful crop, before they make their appearance; but as they are the natural product of the soil, they thrive better, and grow faster than the corn, and soon overtop it. And, if they are suffered to remain, they absorb the moisture, and exhaust the fertilizing virtue of the ground; they also shade the corn from the kindly influences of the sun and rain, and so choke it, that it has not room to expand itself.—It therefore gradually declines, and at last dies away, and thus renders the husbandman's labour, and the seed sown, fruitless. And so it often fares with the word of God; for,—

"He that received seed among thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, (St. Luke adds,) the pleasures of life, and (St. Mark,) desires after other things, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful."—This person proceeds further in the way of duty, than either of those mentioned in the former instances. He not only hears and understands, but, in spite of Satan and his agents, considers, "marks, learns, and inwardly digests" what he hears. Yea he has root in himself; the word sinks deep into his mind and heart. It is received in faith.

humility, and contrition, whence it strikes its root downward, as it were, into the soul, and takes fast hold of all its powers. It springs up, and manifests its prolific quality, in love, joy, peace; in hope, patience, meekness, which promise much fruit and bid fair for a plentiful harvest.—But, alas! after some time the thorns spring up also, perhaps unperceived at first, and obstruct, or entirely prevent its fruitfulness.—They gradually choke it, and deprive it of all its life and vigour, so that it either dies quite away, or brings forth no fruit to perfection.

To thorns among corn, our Lord compares, first “the cares of the world,” and that very properly, “for,” says HENRY, “they both came in with sin, and are a fruit of the curse; they are good in their place to stop a gap, but the man must be well armed that deals much in them; they are entangling, vexing, scratching, and their end is to be burned.” By the world we understand here all that is in the world. all the things of time and sense in general. Now a prudent care, and concern about these things, is by no means here discountenanced.—But what is blamed, is an immoderate, distrustful, anxious care. We must not suffer *these* cares to engross our thoughts. We must not be careful without God, without an eye to his superintending providence, without confiding in, and casting our care upon it.—We must not suffer our minds to be perplexed, rent, and torn, with such cares; our peace to be disturbed, and our temper ruffled, by them. They must not discompose us, and render us uneasy or unhappy.—If they do, they will soon exhaust the vigour of our souls, withdraw our attention from, and so starve the root of faith and humility. Hence the graces

springing therefrom will gradually wither and die away. The cares of this world will overtop, prevail against, and at last quite choke and destroy, the cares of the world to come, and, consequently all our religion.

But to thorns, our Lord compares also the "deceitfulness of riches." Deceitful indeed, for they promise much, but perform little! They offer themselves to many, but give themselves to be possessed by few! They promise to bring much content, satisfaction, and happiness with them, but on the contrary, they bring nothing but perplexity, care, fear, and vexation! They promise to abide with us through life, if not to preserve our name in everlasting remembrance, but frequently they "take to themselves wings and fly away!" They engage our dependence and raise our expectations, but fail not to deceive and disappoint us. We lean on them as though they were the staff of life, but we find, by sad experience, they are but "a broken reed at best, and oft a spear!" They miserably disappoint our confidence, and often also pierce us through with many sorrows. By their glittering lustre, they dazzle our eyes and affect our hearts, and while our attention and affections are engaged by them, God and heaven are forgotten or neglected. Like Judas, who was corrupted by them, "they kiss and betray." They put out the eyes of the mind, harden the heart, and deprive us of the life of God; fill the soul with pride, love to the world, and make men enemies to the whole cross of Christ.

Such was the effect they had upon Demas of old, who forsook Jesus Christ, and his apostle Paul, having loved this present world. Such was the effect they have had upon thousands in all ages, who, having "cov-

eted them, have erred from the faith, in the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" They who love money are within a step of loving injustice, fraud, oppression, violence. For, in general, "they who will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition!" a sad gradation; a dreadful fall indeed! Well, then, might our Lord warn us to take heed of covetousness! But, alas! how amazing it is, that so few pay any regard to his warning! How strange that though he and his apostles concur in their testimony respecting the danger of accumulating worldly wealth, and have assured us that they who possess them shall "hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven," yet they should still be highly esteemed, and eagerly desired, by those who profess to believe all this, and to seek to enter into that kingdom!

When St. Luke adds, immediately after riches, "the pleasures of life," he, no doubt, intended to intimate the close connexion there is between them. Riches have a fatal tendency to effeminate the mind, and render us incapable of "enduring hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." They give us an opportunity of gratifying our carnal desires, of indulging our appetites and passions, in every excess to which the Devil, or our own heart, prompts us. A man that has riches is at liberty to eat and drink, and "fare sumptuously every day," and "clothe himself in purple and fine linen." He may give himself up to every indulgence and sensual gratification. He can make a "god of his belly, glory in his shame," and "work all uncleanness with greediness," no man forbidding him, but perhaps many exciting him.

How destructive then are riches! how fatal their tendency! They too often, like the fabulous Circe's cup, turn men into brutes and make them wallow like swine, in every kind of iniquity. And now what room can the kingdom of God find in such hearts, thus pre-engaged and employed? Surely the good seed must be choked here! The Holy Spirit will never make these unclean and filthy sinks, the habitation of his holiness! No, he will depart from them, and "give them up to their own hearts' lusts." And now, because "after they escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Therefore their end is destruction, and for them is "reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

The cares of this world most beset the poor; the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of life, affect the rich and great. But there is another kind of weed which hinders the growth of grace in all, and that is, "desires after other things." This equally annoys high and low, rich and poor, young and old, and if not suppressed and eradicated is equally destructive to the life of God in all.—God himself is all-sufficient to satisfy the most enlarged desires of all his intelligent creatures; there is enough in him to make them com-

pletely happy; but the world is altogether insufficient to afford satisfaction to the desires of an immortal soul. Hence it is, that God forbids us to give our hearts to the world, and commands us to give them to him. The language of our hearts should be, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee," or, in comparison of thee; "as the thirsty hart panteth for the water brooks," so should our souls long after God; and whatever else we desire should be with the most entire submission to his will, and with a view to his glory. For to enjoy God and glorify him, should be the one end of our actions, and the reigning desire of our souls, to which all other desires should be subservient. When this is the case, we are in the way to make swift advances in the divine life, and shall soon be fruitful in every good word and work. As corn, when overtopped and shaded by the weeds, is enabled to imbibe the moisture of the air, the refreshing showers of heaven, and the quickening and fructifying influences of the sun; so, when this is the case, we are disposed to receive fresh communications of divine light and love, holiness and happiness. The showers of divine grace will water our souls, and the sun of righteousness will break through the clouds of sin and unbelief, will scatter our doubts, disperse our fears, and revive, cheer, and exhilarate our souls. Then shall we "bud and blossom as the rose, and bring forth fruit like Lebanon."

But when the desire of our heart is turned towards the creature, and we encourage a thousand imaginary wants, we are not only perplexed with endless fears, and distracted with needless cares, and our grace is thereby, as it were, choked, but our intercourse with

God is interrupted, and the communication of his influences intercepted, a veil is drawn, and a partition erected betwixt us and God, so that we no longer see his light, or taste his love; he no longer strengthens us by his power, or comforts us with his favour. but "our iniquities separate between us and our God, and our sins hide his face from us." And now what remains, but that we wither and die away, and provoke the great husbandman to break down our hedge, that we may be trodden under foot, and eaten up by the wild beasts of the forest, and left for ever as a prey to their lawless ravages, being accursed, and destined to the general burning. Or, if there is any hope concerning us, that we may yet bear fruit, we oblige him to plough us down, as it were, by fresh afflictions, and harrow and purge us by fresh trials. It will be an infinite mercy if he take the latter method, though painful and distressing to us, and do not give us up as incurable, which we well deserve, and refuse to bestow any more culture and pains upon such wild and barren souls.

Now when all these who receive the seed as among thorns, who "begin in the spirit but end in the flesh," who run well for a time, but are by and by hindered, are also excepted; alas! how few yet remain! How few "endure to the end, and are finally saved!" run with patient perseverance their appointed race; so run as to obtain! Few indeed have we left whom to compare to the good ground, which did not receive the seed in vain!

IV "Some fell upon good ground;" *soft*, not like that by the highway side; *deep*, not like that upon the rock; *purged*, not like that full of thorns. What a pity

it is, that good seed does not always fall upon such a soil, and then there is no loss! Now this brought forth, "some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty," that is, in various proportions; some abundantly more than others. It remains, lastly that we consider, (which I shall do very briefly,) our Lord's explication of this, before I add some words by way of application of the subject.

"He that received seed into good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it," or, as the word means, *considereth* it. Herein he is different from the first class of hearers. He is thoroughly acquainted with what he hears, and meditates upon it.—St. Luke, in the parallel passage, informs us, that "having heard the word they keep it," (*κατεχουσιν*,) *they retain it*. Thus is he distinguished from the stony ground hearers. They received the word with joy, but did not retain it. But he who receives the seed, as in good ground, notwithstanding the opposition he meets with, holds fast what he has received, the word itself, and the change it was instrumental in working in him. Again, St. Luke tells us, also how they are distinguished from the third class, when he mentions "an honest and good heart." The thorny ground was dishonest, as it were; it promised much, but performed little. It bid fair for a good crop, but after all became unfruitful. It deceived the husbandman's expectations. He bestowed much pains and expense upon it, in hopes it would repay him all back with interest, but he was disappointed. It made him no return, no kind of recompense; it produced nothing but weeds.—

Just so it is with sinners in general, but, especially, with backsliders. God is at much pains and expense

with them, but they make him no returns. He "looks that they should bring forth grapes, but behold only wild grapes."—But not so those compared to the good ground. They are honest and faithful to their trust; they do not receive the grace of God in vain, but bring forth fruit answerable in some degree to their privileges. The reason is plain; their hearts are renewed by divine grace, and made truly good, as St. Luke has it. Naturally their hearts were "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," but the Lord has fulfilled his promise, and given them a "new heart, and renewed a right spirit within them." And hence arises all their capacity of bearing fruit.

The fruit here meant, which those who receive the seed aright bring forth, is all inward and outward holiness; every holy temper, word, and work; especially repentance, faith, love, obedience, resignation, zeal for the honour of God, and the good of man; humility, patience, meekness, long suffering, gentleness, with justice, mercy and truth, in all their branches, and whatsoever has a tendency to glorify God, prepare their own souls for heaven, and profit the children of men. Persuaded that Christ "gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works," they make it their care to live "godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present world;" and, "as they have opportunity, to do good unto all men." "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they think of these things," yea, and

They are not, however, all fruitful in the same degree, but some vastly more than others: some bring forth “an hundred fold, some sixty, and some only thirty;” *i. e.* in various proportions, according to the opportunity and ability God hath given, and the use they make of his gifts. God, the sovereign Lord of all, who has a right, doubtless, to do what he will with his own, has not given the same talents and means of improvement to all. Some are much more favoured in this respect than others, have more and greater advantages, both for doing and getting good. This will, therefore, necessarily make a very considerable difference, both in the holiness and usefulness of Christ’s disciples. And accordingly. God, who is not a hard master, does not expect to reap what he has not sowed, but only “where much is given much is required.”

But beside this, all are by no means equally faithful to the grace of God, and hence also must arise a difference in faithfulness. Some are more obedient than others to the Spirit’s operations, more diligent to improve their advantages for growing in grace and glorifying God, more careful to embrace the helps afforded them, and lay out the talents conferred upon them, according to the intent of the giver. So that on this account, likewise, it is no wonder if some are far more holy and useful than others; more exemplary in their conduct, and more devoted in their hearts, greater ornaments to their profession, and more instrumental in doing good. And yet those who are most eminent for being fruitful in every good temper, word and work, while they acknowledge that “from him is their fruit found,” and are therefore humbly thankful, must, at the same time, confess that they might still bring forth

much more fruit. "Not unto us, not unto us," will they say, "but to thy name be the praise; for thou, O Lord hast wrought all our works in us," and "it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed."

I have only now to APPLY, briefly, what has been delivered. You, my brethren, are a field naturally barren and unfruitful; a desolate wilderness, in which briars and thorns, thistles, and weeds of every kind, grow in great plenty; but no fruit acceptable to God, or profitable to your own souls. You, by nature, are children of wrath, even as others, accursed of God, and nigh unto burning. Nevertheless, even you hath Christ purchased; worthless as you are, by his own precious blood, and you are consequently his undoubted property. But for what end has he bought you? Not that you might remain still in your original state of sin and wretchedness, but that he might save you from it. He purchased your barren souls, that he might cultivate you, sow you with the seed of eternal life, and render you pleasant to himself, and fruitful in good works. And has he not long been prosecuting this purpose of his love? Yes; he has commanded the plough of affliction and adversity to traverse the field of your hearts, and the rain of his Spirit to descend upon it, and water it with showers of grace: and he has scattered the seed of eternal life most plentifully upon you. The Gospel has been preached to you in its power and purity, and his ordinances have been liberally dispensed among you. And now judge, I pray you, what could he have done more for you than he has done? What fruit then have you brought forth?

Inquire, my brethren, Have you brought forth the fruits of unfeigned repentance, of lively faith, of fervent

love, of cheerful obedience, of entire resignation, of diligence in doing good, and of patience in suffering ill? Have the graces of humility, and meekness, and gentleness, and long-suffering, and zeal, and purity, possessed your breasts, while the law of kindness and truth dwelt on your tongues, and seasoned all your conversation as with salt, so as to render it profitable to others? Have neither justice nor mercy forsook you; have you bound them, as it were, about your neck, written them on the table of your heart, and uniformly practised them in your lives? At least do you now, whatever you have done in time past, “live godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present world?”

Surely, if you do not bring forth these fruits, it is because you have not received the seed of the word as upon good ground, and its beneficial influence has been prevented by some of the fore-mentioned hinderances. O! examine yourselves concerning the causes of your unfruitfulness. Have you not received the seed as by the way-side; have you not heard the word without due attention, without earnest prayer, or after-meditation? If so, it is no wonder that Satan, or his emissaries, have caught up the word which was sown in your hearts, lest you should believe and be saved. And surely where no seed is deposited, no fruit can be expected. But think you God will suffer the precious seed of his word to be lost, and the labour he hath bestowed upon you to be frustrated by your fault, and never call you to an account for your negligence? O! be assured, God hath not forgot the expense his love prompted him to undertake. and the pains he hath taken with you; and ere long, if your repentance prevent not, he will arrest you as debtors to his grace, and to his justice, and will “de-

liver you to the tormentors," till you pay all that is due unto him. His incorruptible and powerful word shall not be lost, or "return unto him void." but shall either prove "a savour of death unto death, or of life unto life," to all who hear it. Like "a two-edged sword," it will either pierce your souls, by keen convictions, in this world, "dividing between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, as it were, and being a discern-er of the thoughts and intents of the heart;" or, when the "books are opened," and "every secret thing is brought into judgment," it will "cut you asunder, and appoint you your portion with hypocrites and unbelievers."

"Truth is great and will prevail;" wherefore hearken to it, meditate upon it, and "receive it in the love of it." Pray for the "Spirit of truth to guide you into all truth," and to write it upon your hearts. "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." In humility and meekness "receive the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." And see that you "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Remember that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," will be the portion of those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness;" see that you, therefore, "obey from the heart that form of doctrine which is delivered you." Thus will you find the Gospel the power of God to your salvation," and having "purified your souls by obeying the truth," and being "made free thereby" from all vile affection, you will unfeignedly love God, and all mankind, and your whole conversation will be worthy of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

But if you have hitherto received the seed as "upon

stony places," if it has never taken deep root in your hearts, I advise you to reflect much on your sinfulness, guilt, and misery, both by nature and practice. Think, likewise, what Christ hath done and suffered for you. Consider in what a miserable situation you must have been, if the Lord Jesus had not shed his precious blood for your redemption; and in what a still more deplorable state you must be to all eternity, notwithstanding his mediation, if you neglect, the great salvation which he hath purchased for you. Be much in prayer that these awful things may be deeply impressed upon your hearts, that you may be truly awakened to a sense of your danger, and thoroughly convinced of your depravity and weakness. Look unto him in whom all fulness dwells, for the influences of his Spirit to "convince" you "of sin, and of righteousness," to impart to you that deep repentance, unfeigned faith, and fervent love, which will not suffer you to take offence at the cross of Christ, or to remain slothful and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Redeemer. Thus will you never stumble at those rocks of offence which will lie in your way, but will cheerfully follow the Lord Jesus through good and evil report, and will rejoice to "suffer with him" here, that you may "reign with him" hereafter.

Perhaps you have received the seed as "among thorns." Though the word at first sunk into your hearts, was softened by grace, struck deeply its roots, and took hold of the powers of your souls, and, springing up, promised much fruit, yet, alas! by and by "the thorns sprang up with it and choked the seed." "The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and desires after other things," entered in, disappointed your expectations, and after all rendered you unfruitful. You

possibly did not perceive them at first, or you thought they would do little, if any, harm; thus you suffered them to remain, till they have got such firm hold on your hearts that it now seems impracticable to eradicate them, though sensible of the mischief they occasion, you perhaps greatly wish to do it.

If, however, you sincerely desire they should be rooted out, be not discouraged; His grace is yet, "sufficient for you." It is true you have slighted and abused it, and well deserve that it should visit your hearts no more. But he is merciful to pardon what is past, and long-suffering to bear with your present infirmities. Do not then flee from him, but draw near to him. "Come boldly to the throne of grace," by faith and prayer claim the accomplishment of his promises, and he will not fail to fulfil his word; he "will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." Only be watchful. Carefully guard against whatever you find most obstructive to your growth in grace, and your bringing forth suitable fruit. Especially recollect, that "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Let neither riches, nor honours, nor the pleasures of life, engross your desires, nor enslave your souls. But live for Eternity, live to and for God. Let your thoughts dwell upon him, let your desires ascend towards him, and rejoice in him from day to day. Make the Lord your chief good, your portion, your treasure, your all in all. Let no idol have place in your hearts, but keep holy the dwelling place of the Most High. Thus will he "take up his abode in you," and manifest his perfections to you; he will transport you with his beauty, comfort you with his love, and satisfy you with his salvation.—By the all-sufficient grace of God, extirpate

and clear away those destructive weeds from the field of your hearts; spare none, though the execution of this duty should give you pain, like the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye; and turning by faith to the Lord Jesus with ardent desires, let your souls imbibe the refreshing showers of his grace. Thus it shall acquire an entirely new appearance: it shall again bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit pleasing to God, and profitable to man; while its "smell will be as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed."

LXIX.

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD CONCERNING JESUS AT HIS TRANSFIGURATION.

MAATHEW XVII. 5.

*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;
hear ye him.*

THE portion of Sacred History with which these words are connected, is one of the most remarkable and striking that have been recorded by the Evangelists. It relates to that wonderful event, the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, which took place at a time when it was evidently most seasonable, and on an occasion which peculiarly demanded it. The disciples being fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and Peter, in the name of the rest, having professed his faith in Him as such, (ch. xvi. 13—20,) Christ, from that time began to show them "that he must suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and Scribes, and be

killed, and be raised again the third day," (ver. 21,) and that all his disciples also, must be willing to suffer, to "deny themselves, and take up their cross," and even to incur martyrdom in defence of his cause. (Ver. 24—28.) Now, that they might not be offended at those scenes of deep humiliation and suffering, through which they were to see him pass, or at the hardships and sufferings that awaited themselves, "after six days," reckoned exclusively from that in which the discourse, recorded in the preceding chapter, was delivered, to that on which the transfiguration took place, or, including those two days, "about eight days after," as Luke says, 'Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother,' the three disciples whom he appears to have admitted to a peculiar intimacy, (see Mark v. 37; and Matt. xxvi. 37.) "and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart." Tradition relates that it was mount Tabor, which was situated towards the south of Galilee; but as St Mark relates, that, after the transfiguration, Jesus and his disciples passed through Galilee to Capernaum, (Mark ix. 30, 33,) it is probable it was some other mountain. But wherever it was, while engaged in prayer, (Luke ix. 29,) he was "transfigured," or *metamorphosed*, "before them;" which implies, either that the substance of his body, or only its outward appearance, was altered, the former being more probable from the expression used by St. Luke, "the fashion," το εἶδος του προσώπου αὐτου ἐτέρον,) *the appearance*. "of his countenance was altered." "And his face did shine as the sun" became radiant and bright, like the sun in his unclouded and meridian splendour: "and his raiment was white as the light:" St. Mark says, "became

shining exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them;" St Luke—"it was white and glistering;" or, as the original, (λευκος εξασπαπτων,) properly signifies, *white as lightning*. "The indwelling Deity darted out its rays through the veil of his flesh, and that with such transcendent splendour, that he no longer bore the form of a servant. His face shown with Divine majesty, like the sun in its strength; and all his body was so irradiated by it, that his clothes could not conceal his glory, but became white and glistering as the very light, with which he clothed himself as with a garment."

Thus the disciples, who witnessed this vision, would gain some ideas of the Divine glory, which Jesus "had with the Father before the world was," and which he inherently possessed, though veiled under the meanness of his human body. Thus they would also be confirmed in their belief of his Messiahship, notwithstanding the sufferings through which he was about to pass, and they would hereafter be encouraged, when called to suffer in defence of the truth of his Gospel, from this manifestation of the glory which they would obtain when their body "should be fashioned like unto his glorious body." (Phil. iii. 21.)

But to heighten the grandeur and solemnity of the scene, "behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias, talking with him." Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great restorer of the law, and the chief of the Prophets, appeared in the glories of immortality, to converse with Jesus; and, according to St. Luke, the subject of their conversation was "the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem;" or those sufferings terminating in his death, whereby the law, both

moral and ceremonial. would be fulfilled and magnified, the prophecies accomplished, and the redemption of mankind effected. This was a subject, important above all others, and most suited to engage the thoughts and conversation of those illustrious persons, who were certainly the most illustrious that had ever met together on earth. While this glorious scene was exhibited, the three disciples "were," as St. Luke informs us, "heavy with sleep." But they awaked in time to see the glory of Christ, and that of the two men who stood with him. The resplendent beams that issued from his body, and the voices of his attendants, perhaps, roused them, and having opened their eyes, they must have been amazed, as well as delighted, to behold their Master, in the majesty of his transfigured state, receiving the homage of such distinguished persons, whom, from the discourse they held with Jesus, they learnt to be Moses and Elijah. Peter, in particular, through surprise and pleasure, broke out in an exclamation, and "said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He supposed, perhaps, Jesus had now assumed his proper dignity; that Elias was come according to the promise of Malachi, and that the kingdom of the Messiah was about to be set up, and, therefore he hastily proposed that some temporary accommodations should be erected for Jesus and his august attendants: intending, perhaps, to bring the rest of the disciples, with the multitude from below, to behold his matchless glory. "But he spake, not knowing what he said;" (so St. Luke:) they were the words of surprise, not of sound indolence: and perhaps few in such an

astonishing circumstance could have been perfectly masters of themselves.

Now whilst Peter was yet speaking, "behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them." This cloud probably was like that which took possession first of the Tabernacle, and afterwards of the Temple, when it was dedicated, and which "filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." (Exod. xl. 34; and 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.) This, it is well known, used to be termed *the Shckinah*, or visible symbol of the Divine presence. A similar cloud now overshadowed Jesus and his glorified attendants, and is, therefore, termed by Peter, "the excellent glory." (2 Ep. i. 17.) "And, behold, a voice out of the cloud," proceeding from *Him* whose glory it represented, which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" the same testimony which the Father had borne to him at his baptism. (Matt. iii. 17.) To which was subjoined a solemn command, "Hear ye him." This injunction being pronounced when Moses and Elijah, who may be conceived to have represented the Law and the Prophets, were present, it evidently implied that Jesus was superior to them; that he must be heard in preference to them both, and that, though the preceding dispensations were in perfect harmony with the Christian, yet the Gospel was the most excellent, and must be more regarded than the Law and the Prophets.* Let us consider,

*See the Author's Commentary, where most of the preceding observations are found.

I. THE IMPORTANT AND INFINITELY INTERESTING
DECLARATION OF THE FATHER FROM HEAVEN.

“This is my beloved Son.” (Comp. 2 Pet. i. 17.)

This is not affirmed of Moses or Elias. They, although wise, holy, faithful, and divinely commissioned, were still but servants in God’s house; Christ was a Son in “his own house.” (Heb. iii. 6.) — —

This is not affirmed of any creature; not even of the highest. (Heb. i. 4.) Christ is related to his Father in a sense that no creature is; he is his Father’s perfect image his second self; the inheritor of his very nature, as a son inherits that of his father. — —

The expression partly respects his pre-existent state. (John i. :—14.) — —

In his human nature he was the Son of God. (Luke i. 35.) His miraculous conception, by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, gave him a superiority to the holiest and best of men that ever lived. — —

In his whole person, he was “the brightness,” *απαύλασμα*,) the *effulgence* “of his Father’s glory.” (Heb. i. 3. — —

“In whom I am well pleased.”

This, though not recorded by Mark or Luke, was, undoubtedly spoken on this occasion, as we have the concurrent testimony of St. Matthew and St. Peter. The original words, (*εν ᾧ ευδοκῆσα*,) properly signify an entire acquiescence, or a special and singular complacency and satisfaction. This the Father takes in his person. as he was “God in Christ;” in his undertaking to redeem and save mankind;” in his whole process in order to accomplish that undertaking; in his doctrine; his life: his miracles: his sufferings; his atonement; his

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resurrection; his ascension; his intercession; in his appointment to, and execution of, all his saving offices; in all these, the Father rests with complacency and delight. — —

II. THE DIVINE COMMAND.

“Hear ye him.”

This refers to the solemn charge given in Deut. xviii. 15, to hearken to that Prophet who should be raised up like unto Moses. In order to enforce that injunction, God speaks from “the excellent glory.” How awful this voice! how important the command! how perilous to disobey! This the Jews found, when experiencing the consequences of their rejection of Christ.

“Hearing,” in this passage, includes reading, and meditating, on the words of Christ; and not only attention to his audible voice, in the days of his flesh, but to his discourses and observations, invitations and promises, precepts and warnings, recorded by his Evangelists; and also the sermons of his Apostles, recorded in the Acts, and their Epistles. For although his own discourses are chiefly meant, and are chiefly deserving of regard, yet they spoke and wrote by the Spirit of Christ.

But how must we hear him?—With reverence for his person, considering its dignity and glory; and for his message and counsels, as delivered by one so glorious;—with humility, under a deep conviction that we are utterly unworthy such a person should speak to us, and condescend to do and suffer so much for our benefit;—with gratitude to him for his unparalleled condescension and kindness, and labours, to promote our instruc-

tion and salvation;—with seriousness, being persuaded of the infinite importance of all that he hath spoken, whether by himself, or his Apostles; and that it concerns us infinitely to regard all he has revealed;—with faith, and an assurance of the infallible truth of every doctrine;—with desire, expectation, and confidence, as to every promise;—with love to every duty which he hath commanded;—with an obedient mind, being disposed to do whatever is enjoined;—with solemnity and awe, as to what he hath threatened;—with prayer before, in, and after hearing, persuaded that of ourselves we can neither know, nor experience, nor practise, what we hear;—with after meditation, and self examination;—with daily, earnest, and persevering endeavours, to bear fruit suitable to what we hear, and to reduce all we hear immediately and constantly to practice.

LXX.

CONVERSION NECESSARY TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

MATTHEW XVIII. 3.

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It will cast much light on these words to consider the occasion on which they were spoken. This, as appears from the context, compared with Mark ix. 33—37, and Luke ix. 46—48, was a dispute which had

occured among the disciples of our Lord, who should be the greatest in that temporal kingdom, they imagined he was about to set up. This reasoning was now, as at other times when it took place, most unseasonable. Our Lord had, as three of the Evangelists inform us, (Matt. xvii. 22; Mark ix. 30, 31; Luke ix. 44,) just predicted his sufferings and death, for which he had also prepared them by a vision of his Divine glory. (Matt. xvii. 1.) Yet, at this time, after having professed so much love to him, and so much zeal for his honour, the Apostles are entertaining worldly and ambitious views, and contending with one another which should be the greatest in an earthly kingdom. Such is human nature blind, unfeeling, selfish, ambitious, covetous, contentious, about the little, low, perishable things of this present, short-enduring world!

Our Lord, to convince them how little they understood the nature of his kingdom, and the only way to attain pre-eminence in it, took "a little child, and set him in the midst of them. and said, Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

It is to be feared that too many professors of Christianity in all ages, resemble the disciples of our Lord, in the dispositions they manifested at this time, by entertaining selfish, carnal, and worldly views and desires; whilst some make religion a mere stalking-horse to advance their own earthly, sensual, and wicked designs and projects. Too many of us need the lessons here given by our Lord.

Consider.

**I. THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST, TERMED
HERE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, AND OFTEN,
THE KINGDOM OF GOD; AND WHAT IS IMPLIED
IN ENTERING INTO IT.**

The kingdom of Christ is, his reign in and over mankind, whereby they become his loyal subjects, and he manifests his wisdom, power, and love; his holiness, justice, and mercy, in delivering, protecting, ruling, enriching, exalting, and making them happy, in time and eternity. It must be considered in two states and periods; in a state of imperfection, warfare, and suffering on earth, and of perfection, triumph, and joy, in heaven.

As to the former,—It is not of this world; it is not earthly; intended, like the kingdoms of this world, to help men to attain, or to protect them in the possession of earthly things, as riches, honours, titles, dignities; but to prepare men for, and bring them to heaven.—It is not sensual; not the reign of nature freed from control, and suffered to gratify its covetous and sensual desires; but the reign of grace subduing this corrupt nature, in all its lusts and passions, its evil desires, designs, thoughts, &c.; not erected, supported, and enlarged, by human policy and power, violence and cruelty, but by humility, simplicity, meekness, and love.—It is not devilish; a kingdom of darkness, sin, and misery, supported by vice and wickedness, and calculated to spread ruin and desolation; but it is divine, erected and supported by light, holiness, and happiness, which proceed from God, and is calculated to diffuse and maintain these blessings wherever it extends.

As to the latter; this also is two-fold. It implies—The full redemption of the soul from all the ignorance, sin, and misery, it was liable to on earth; the placing it beyond the reach of any enemy or evil; the introducing it to the enjoyment of all good, the possession of all things excellent; the Creator and his creatures, all riches, honour, and felicity.—The redemption of the body from infirmity, affliction, pain, death, the grave, and the placing it in a state of perfection, health, immortality, and glory.

We enter into this kingdom of Christ, by becoming members of his true Church.—Into the former, by becoming members of his Church militant, subject to his sway, obedient to his laws, by yielding ourselves to his government and protection, by receiving his kingdom within us, even “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”—Into the other, when we “die in the Lord,” rise to glory, and become members of the Church triumphant. — —

II. THE NATURE OF THIS CONVERSION,—

or, in what sense we must be converted and made like little children, in order to our entering into this kingdom.

It implies the being *turned*, (*σφαητε*.) From self to Christ; from self-dependence, to a dependence on Christ for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; from self-love, unlawful, and carried to an improper extent, to the love of Jesus; from self-will, habit, custom, or caprice, as our rule, to make the will of Jesus our rule; from self-seeking, to seek the honour of Christ, the interest of his kingdom, and the pleasing of him.—From the world, which we naturally make our

portion, to seek it in God, the only certain and all sufficient good.—From sin to righteousness; from sin both inward and outward, from its power, its love, its nature, to holiness, outward and inward, to its power, its love, its nature. — —

It implies the being inwardly changed.—We do not, by this expression, mean any essential change of body or soul; nor a conversion from a false creed and erroneous opinions, to a true belief and correct opinions; nor do we mean merely a reformation of conduct, as from an irregular and debauched, to a regular and sober life; we may be tired of certain sins, and outgrow them; or we may leave one sin for another, while we remain unconverted.—But we understand a change of the whole man, from a state of sinful nature to a state supernatural grace. We are born in sin, averse from God, turned to the creatures; we are corrupt in every power, and this respects the understanding, will, and affections; all the tempers and dispositions are depraved. Conversion supposes an enlightened understanding, a rectified judgment; the intention, choice, and resolution, of the will, subjected and regulated by the word and grace of God; the affections gained over to God, the tempers changed, and sanctified, and the mind of Christ imparted to us.

Conversion makes us like little children. Not that it makes us ignorant, and without experience; or fickle and changeable; or thoughtless and trifling; or weak and irresolute. But it makes us sincere, simple, humble, teachable; brings us under command and government; renders us dependent on our heavenly Father; free from anxious care; inoffensive and harmless.

As it regards the marks of conversion; light in the understanding is not one. This was attained by Balaam and Judas, who were not converts. (Num. xxxi. 16; Matt. xxvi. 47. See also Matt. vii. 22.) The sun shining on a wall of mud, produces no image. The light reflected by a looking-glass shows a man his own likeness, but "he goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." (Jam. i. 24.) The air, on the contrary, is illuminated and changed. So the light of truth affects the regenerate mind.—Peace in the conscience is not a sure mark, for it may be false and mere presumption.—Trouble of conscience, is not, for this likewise was possessed by Judas; (Matt. xxvii. 3;) Cain. (Gen. iv. 13.) Exemplify, by a malefactor, or a miser, in a storm.—The affections being moved affords no sure criterion. Instance the stony ground hearers; (Matt. xiii. 20;) Herod. (Mark v. 20.) They may be excited by novelty; by any thing great and surprising; by the pathos of a preacher.—Nor are great gifts or endowments: instance, again, in Balaam, Judas.—Neither is a change in the life; leaving off sin as a mariner throws things over-board when in danger of shipwreck; as Lot's wife left Sodom, at the same time loving it. (Gen. xix. 26.)—Nor, finally, a civility and refinement of manners, amiable temper, nor a quiet inoffensive behaviour. — —

But the marks of real conversion are—A willingness to be tried. "Examine me, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." (Psal. xvi. 2.) A thief hates the light which discovers his iniquitous proceedings.—Love to the godly, because they are godly; loving them the more, as they appear to be more godly; loving all the godly.—A "respect to all God's commandments,"

(Psal. cxix. 6; 1 John ii. 3; Jer. xxxi. 33.) This implies that we aim at the highest degrees of obedience inwardly and outwardly; not imitating the Pharisees, who paid attention only to the outward act; that we regard all relative duties both to God, our neighbour, or ourselves.—Hatred to, and victory over all known sin, (1 John iii. 9,) though it be beloved, secret, profitable, as that of the right eye or right hand; including sins of the heart, being “circumcised in heart;” sins of the mind; (Jer. iv. 14;) spiritual sins, as pride, envy, hypocrisy, unbelief, hardness of heart.—The avoiding temptations. (Matt. vi. 13.)—A steadfast opposition against sin, from the whole man; including, not only the understanding, reason, and conscience, but the will, affections, and bodily powers.

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THIS CONVERSION.

Grace and glory are the same in effect; the former is the seed and preparation for the latter. — —

Unconverted persons are unfit for heaven. For not being members of God’s Church on earth, they are unfit for the employments of the Church above, consisting in adoration, praise, love, and holy obedience. But this is work to which the unconverted have no inclination. They say, When will the Sabbath be gone? When will the prayers, the sermon, and the restraints of the day be ended? — — They are unfit for the company of heaven — — They are unfit for the ‘reward of heaven, consisting—partly in the *vision* of God. If the light of a taper offends us, can we bear that of the sun? If the imperfect holiness of man be intolerable; how much more so must be the perfect holiness of God!

This is hard to be borne even by a child of God. "Woe is me! for I am undone—for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." (Isai. vi. 5.) "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke v. 8.)—Partly in *full communion* with God; but the unconverted hate to hear of this. Wicked men cannot desire heaven, unless it be a Mahometan paradise. —

Should such go to heaven, God's truth fails—his justice is lost,—his holiness is violated. — —

They would disturb heaven, and be like jarring strings to instrumental harmony.

God "hateth all the workers of iniquity." (Psal. v. 5.) They are haters of God. (Rom. i. 23.) "The carnal mind is enmity with God." While views and inclinations so adverse and incompatible mutually exist in the mind of God and the sinner, is it possible they can unite in heaven? Or, God having resolved such persons shall not inherit the felicities of his people, will it be in their power to force the gates of heaven open against his will? No; we know it is impossible. The only condition, then, whereby we can ensure our everlasting happiness is that of the text; "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

